

History and Tropology

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The Rise and Fall of Metaphor

F. R. Ankersmit

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Introduction

Transcendentalism and the Rise and Fall of Metaphor

Twentieth-century philosophy is fascinated by the phenomenon of language. Russell and the logical positivists saw formalized language as the logical matrix for all our knowledge of the world. And they argued that it would be the philosopher's task to reduce language by formal analysis to its logical core and, furthermore, that a thorough analysis of that logical core would show us how all reliable (i.e., scientific) knowledge is built out of its elementary, atomistic constituents. Carnap gave the logical positivist's thesis a polemical edge when he added that metaphysics—and metaphysics embraced, in his view, the greater part of Western philosophy—originated in the philosopher's ignorance of the proper syntactic rules for the logical constitution of the world. Hence, logical analysis, as advocated and practiced by the logical positivists, would dispel most of the problems that had been discussed in the tradition of Western philosophy. Thanks to a logical analysis of the language that had been used for stating these problems, they would not be solved in the proper sense of the word but would be shown to be pseudoproblems.

At a later stage, the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Ryle, Austin, and many others would turn to the social dimension of language; for Wittgenstein, the many different languages we use on different occasions could best be compared to the playing of a game. Playing a game requires that all the players involved accept the rules of the game, and it would be no different with the speakers of a language. Language was no longer a logical calculus but a social practice. And natural language henceforward replaced formalized language as the proper focus of philosophical interest. Carnap's rejection of metaphysics now was abandoned in favor of Strawson's peculiarly Nietzschean thesis that the most general syntactical structures of natural languages determine the metaphysical struc-

ture of our world.¹ Thanks to this sociological (or, as is ordinarily said, *linguistic*) turn, philosophy now received the task of developing a *descriptive metaphysics* that would account for these metaphysical structures of the world.

But what all these philosophies of language had in common—despite their many diversities or even outright oppositions—was the assumption that language is the principal condition for the possibility of all knowledge and meaningful thinking, and that therefore an analysis of language is of as much importance to the contemporary philosopher as an analysis of the categories of the understanding was for the Kant of the first *Critique*. Precisely because of this obvious similarity it has often been pointed out that contemporary philosophy of language can best be seen as a new and more fruitful phase in the transcendentalist program that was inaugurated two centuries ago by Kant.

Two intimately related assumptions underlie contemporary philosophy of language. (I hasten to add that these two assumptions are of primary importance merely from the point of view of what I want to say in this introduction; it certainly is not my wish to make any general claims with regard to the practice of philosophy of language.) The first assumption is a methodological one that harks back to the so-called *resoluto-compositional* method that was adopted by early modernist philosophers like Descartes and Hobbes.² This method requires us to divide complex problems into their simpler components. It is recommended that the philosopher start with the simpler problems and then slowly and carefully work his way up to the larger and more complex issues. The “assumption behind this assumption” is that nothing essential to the larger and more complex issues will be lost when this method is applied. The acceptance of the resoluto-compositional method in the practice of contemporary philosophy of language resulted in the almost universally shared conviction that philosophy of language ought to start with an investigation of the behavior of logical constants, proper names, et cetera, and of the meaning of words and propositions. Obviously this assumption must have an elective affinity with the logical atomism that was described at the beginning of this introduction. Hence, though logical atomism as a philosophical position has been discredited for over half a century, contemporary philosophy of language

1. P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, London, 1971.

2. Descartes proposed four rules for the discovery of truth. The second ran as follows: “de diviser chacune des difficultés que j’examinerais, en autant de parcelles qu’il se pourrait, et qu’il serait requis pour mieux les résoudre” (to divide each of the problems that I would investigate into as many parts as possible and as would be required for better solving them). (R. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, Paris: Flammarion, 1966, 47)

is still “atomist” as far as its method is concerned. We are confronted here once again with the peculiar paradox that philosophers, always so focused on methods used in other disciplines, are largely indifferent to their own methods and their implications.³ In short, with the help of an investigation of propositions (either singular or universal) and their constituent components, or of simple transparent conjunctions of propositions, philosophers of language hoped to discover the transcendental conditions for truth and meaning.

As soon as this method is accepted it will not be hard to appreciate the plausibility of a second assumption of twentieth century philosophy of language. According to this second assumption, the problem of how language might account for a complex reality in terms of texts rather than of individual propositions (the professional concern of the historian!) is regarded as a nonproblem; that is to say, one was unwilling to expect problems here that would *not* be reducible to the kind of problems encountered in the analysis of propositions and their parts. Most of the fortunes and misfortunes of contemporary philosophy of history can be explained from this perspective. With regard to the *misfortunes*, it must be pointed out that philosophers of history were often tempted to superimpose this assumption on philosophy of history. Thus in the fifties and sixties, philosophy of history preferred to focus on the elements of the historical text, like singular statements about historical states of affairs, statements expressing causal connections, or on the temporal perspective of statements about the past (Danto’s “narrative sentences”). The historical text as a whole was rarely, if ever, the topic of philosophical investigation. This is all the more to be regretted since the *fortunes* of philosophy of history self-evidently lie with the historical text and not its parts. Only a philosophy of history concentrating on the historical text as a whole could contribute importantly to contemporary philosophy of history and go beyond a mere application of what had already been discovered elsewhere. History is the first discipline that comes to mind if we think of disciplines attempting to give a truthful representation of a complex reality by means of a complex text. Hence, what is so interesting about the historical discipline is that it so clearly suggests the limitations of the resolutio-compositional method. Considered from this perspective philosophy of history could have provided philosophy of language with a wholly new departure, resulting in a philosophy of language that would pose new and interesting problems, both unstatable and unsolvable within the parameters of existing philosophy of language. In this way Collingwood’s prophecy—that it would be the main business of twentieth-century philosophy to come to terms with

3. See chapter 5 of this volume.

twentieth-century history—could be realized.⁴ History would then be as important to contemporary philosophy as science was to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy. (As we shall see below, giving philosophy of history this task does not in the least imply that philosophy of history should be pitted against philosophy of science, or history against science.)

It is sad that philosophers of history are still disappointingly reluctant to meet this challenge. If philosophy of history presently is in such poor shape that one might well ask whether it still exists at all, this has much to do with the unwillingness of philosophers of history to explore the philosophical gold mine that is their exclusive possession. Two factors may (partially) serve to explain this reluctance. First, philosophers of history in the recent past have tended to downgrade the significance of the distinction between historical research (the results of which are typically expressed in terms of individual statements about the past) and historical writing (which has integrated the results of historical research within the whole of the historical text) and refused to attribute to the latter a certain autonomy and independence with regard to the former. The result has been that most philosophy of history has been a philosophy of historical research. The thesis of the theoryladenness of empirical facts has most often justified the rejection of the distinction. Needless to say, insofar as the integration of the results of historical research in historical writing does not merely aim at a confirmation or a reproduction of the relevant theories determining description, this thesis will inevitably fail to justify the rejection of the distinction.

But, more important, it can be shown that texts logically differ from (individual) propositions and that, consequently, historical writing (on a par with the historian's text) can never be completely reduced to (the results of) historical research (on a par with individual propositions about historical states of affairs). For suppose we have a text on, for example, the French Revolution. We should note, then, that it would be impossible to clearly distinguish between those elements in the text that refer purely to the French Revolution without describing it and those elements that ascribe certain features to the French Revolution without referring to it. There is no clear border between these two, and it might even be argued that the referential elements completely coincide with what is ascribed to the purported object of reference.⁵ Here, then, we observe what texts have in common with paintings from a logical point of view. If we look at Goya's painting of the Duke of Wellington, it is no less impossible to distinguish between what merely denotes the Duke and the features that Goya wished

4. R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, Oxford, 1970, 79.

5. See my "Statements, Texts and Pictures," in F. R. Ankersmit and H. Kellner, eds., *The New Philosophy of History*, London, 1994 (forthcoming).

to ascribe to him with his painting. In the case of statements, however, the distinction is entirely unproblematic and coincides with the functions of the subject-term and the predicate-term of the statement. Thus, we discover here the insurmountable barrier between the statement on the one hand and the historical text or the painting on the other. And because of this logical barrier the necessity of distinguishing between historical research and historical writing cannot be doubted. It follows from this, in turn, that something essential will be lost if we reduce the historical text as a whole to its constituent parts, as the resolutio-compositional method would have us do.

The second factor that may help to explain the reluctance of philosophers of history to develop a philosophy of language devoted to the historical text is the following: Since philosophy of language did not provide the philosopher of history with usable insights, the most obvious strategy was to turn to literary theory. For, since literary theory was accustomed to dealing with texts as a whole (i.e., novels) it seemed reasonable to expect that some intellectual instruments could be found here that might help the philosopher of history to analyze the historical text. Yet one may justifiably have one's doubts about literary theory as a surrogate for this (non-existent) kind of philosophy of language. It is a bad omen that narratology, as developed by Genette, Bal, and others—that *pièce de résistance* of contemporary literary theory—has done little to further our understanding of historical writing.⁶ Analogies to the literary devices used in the novel—and of professional interest for the literary theorist—can undoubtedly be found in historical writing (no one could deny this), but this is insufficient for justifying the claim that literary theory will substantially deepen our insight into historical writing. For, despite such analogies, the aims and effects of literary narrative do not necessarily coincide with those of historical narrative. Think, for example, of Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart* cycle and let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the cycle does indeed give a correct picture of social life in France under Napoléon III. In this case we might decide to read the cycle if we want to be informed about social life in that period. But it will be obvious that the information we are looking for is presented in the cycle in a different way than in, for example, Zeldin's *History of France* (perhaps a somewhat eccentric example, I admit). The cycle would require a specific *kind of reading*: we would have to read the cycle in such a way that the relevant knowledge could be *deduced* from the cycle—whereas it is the pretension of history books to present their readers with that kind of knowledge in a straightforward way. The

6. Illustrative of the unsatisfactory relationship between narratology and the writing of history is D. E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, Albany, 1988, chap. 3.

difference is analogous to that between the clue for a word in a crossword puzzle (the novel) and the intended word itself (history). And naturally this difference must have its consequences for the narrative organization of either novel or historical text.

What has been said up till now provides us with the appropriate background for assessing the achievements and merits of Hayden White's historical theory. A moment ago we observed that *narrativism* (the term I shall henceforth use for referring to a philosophy of language analyzing the historical text as a whole) is only possible if the distinction between historical research and historical writing is recognized and respected. And this certainly is the case in White's historical theory. Though White concedes that it may be difficult and sometimes even impossible to distinguish between fact and interpretation,⁷ a recurrent theme in his earlier work is his insistence on the cognitive gap between annals and chronicles on the one hand and historical texts, in the proper sense of the word, on the other. He thus urges us "to confront the conventional, but never fully analyzed, distinction between 'mere' *chronicle* and the *history* properly so-called."⁸ His argument is that we are mistaken in believing that history is simply hidden in the facts and that telling the story is merely a matter of making explicit what is already there. But telling a story (or writing a history) is a construction we *impose* on the facts. This is already the case at the basic level of our personal life ("no one and nothing *lives* a story,"⁹ writes White), and when we turn to the abstract entities that are the topic of the historian, the autonomy of the text or story (historical writing) with regard to the facts (historical research) is even more obvious.

White adds to his defense of the distinction in question the paradoxical insight that the abandonment of medieval chronicles, for the kind of historical writing that we are now accustomed to, was accompanied by a loss of certainty. For there would be no point in doubting the annalist's statement that in 732 "Charles fought against the Saracens at Poitiers on Saturday," however naive and imperfect that statement may be,¹⁰ whereas it is quite hard to argue convincingly why, for example, Furet's account of the French Revolution is better or more adequate than that given by Labrousse or Soboul. In a certain sense, therefore, the coming into being of modern narrativist (or historian¹¹) historical writing could be regarded

7. H. White, *Tropics of Discourse*, Baltimore, 1978, 107.

8. White, *Tropics*, 111. See also White, *Tropics*, 91, and H. White, *The Content of the Form*, Baltimore, 1987.

9. White, *Tropics*, 111.

10. Quoted in White, *Content*, 7.

11. Narrativism could well be seen as a nominalist version of classical historicism. This has been one of the main theses of my *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*, The Hague, 1983. I add here a note on the terminology that will be adopted in

as a movement *against* truth—as a movement, that is, that invites us to risk ourselves outside the safe sphere of the Pyrrhonist truths of the annalist and the chronicler and to enter the more interesting but also less certain world of historical writing. This paradoxical movement against truth requires our special attention since it supplies us with another argument in favor of the distinction between historical research and historical writing. For if the latter were merely an extension of the former, why should historians risk entering that dangerous territory at all? Clearly they only do so because insights can be gained here that historical research will never be able to give.

But undoubtedly an appreciation of White's use of literary theory will be of more direct importance for an assessment of his place in contemporary philosophy of history. Because of White's versatility and the impressive theoretical scope of his writings this is a vast subject and I necessarily restrict myself to what is of relevance from the perspective of this introduction. The crucial datum from that perspective is that an interesting ambivalence can be discerned in White's use of literary theory. This ambivalence can be elucidated in two steps in the following way. We should first note an ambivalence with regard to what is the real issue in his (early) work. If we consider *Metahistory* we might, at first sight, be inclined to say that what White offers there is a theory of historical writing in the proper sense of the term. However, *Metahistory* is not primarily a book about how historical truth can be attained and tested, et cetera (the main preoccupation of philosophy of history in the fifties and sixties), but about how we should read history books. It was part of White's enterprise to read the great texts of nineteenth-century historians as if they were novels—something no theorist had ever done before.¹² And by doing so he created—together with Lionel Gossman, whose studies on Michelet and Thierry

this collection. The term *historism* will be used to refer to the kind of historical theory that has been developed by Ranke and Humboldt, for example, and whose main theoretical statements are collected in G. G. Iggers and K. von Moltke eds., *The Theory and Practice of History*, New York, 1973. With Mandelbaum, "historism" can be defined as "the belief that an adequate understanding of the nature of any phenomenon and an adequate assessment of its value are to be gained through considering it in terms of the place that it occupied and the role which it played within a process of development." See M. Mandelbaum, *History, Man & Reason*, Baltimore, 1971. "Historism" as understood in this way is, therefore, by no means identical to, *historicism*, which, in Popper's sense of this term, refers to conceptions of history aiming at predicting the future. Speculative philosophies of history are *historicist* and the gap between *historism* and *historicism* is as deep as the one between modernism and postmodernism. In fact, as is argued in the last chapter of this collection, postmodernism relates to modernism as *historism* relates to the Enlightenment.

12. H. V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, 1973. Roland Barthes's book on Michelet anticipated in several respects White's *Metahistory*.

drew on similar inspirations—a new and exciting form of historiography that was unlike anything that had previously been done in the field. The books written by authors like Bann, Kellner, Orr, Partner, and others can be located within this disciplinary matrix for a new historiography that was created by the joint effort of White and Gossman.¹³

Since historiography answers historical instead of philosophical questions, it might seem that *Metahistory* had no bearing on the kind of topics discussed by philosophers of history. Nevertheless, *Metahistory* did also imply a theory of history in the traditional sense; as is already clear from the different kinds of reactions to *Metahistory*, the book is a theory on historical representation as much as one on how to proceed in historiography. It is true that the major theses of this theory (one may think here of White's thoroughgoing relativism, his advocacy of a linguistic turn for historical theory, and the way he argued his views) pointed toward a new phase in the history of historical theory; but as such these theses undeniably fell within the scope of what traditionally was perceived as the task of philosophy of history. Hence, *Metahistory* was ambivalent in that it tended to render historiography more philosophical and philosophy of history more historiographical; the borderlines between the two disciplines were effectively blurred. Self-evidently, the qualification can or even must be added that we can only speak of this ambivalence of *Metahistory* if we take for granted the regime of disciplines antedating *Metahistory*. White might, for good reasons, reject the label of ambivalence and claim coherence for *Metahistory*, while, at the same time, criticize as schizophrenic the position from which *Metahistory* is perceived as "ambivalent." It would not be difficult to account for this chiasm on Kuhnian terms. And this would enable us to appreciate the "revolutionary" character of White's work.

But a more interesting and important ambivalence in White's early work has its source elsewhere, namely in his theory on the roles of the tropes in historical writings. As is well-known, according to *Metahistory*, historical writing is always informed by one of the four tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony. And this confronts us with the ambivalence in White's early theory of history that most deserves our attention within the framework of this introduction. For, on the one hand, this theory of the tropes undoubtedly achieved a *rapprochement* between history and literature: the use of figurative language is what both have in common. And this is also why *Metahistory* was so severely criticized by most commentators. White could simply not be right, it was argued, since his theory of the tropes left no room for notions like the truth and testability

13. For an exposition of the similarities and the differences between White and Gossman, see my review, "Lionel Gossman, *Between History and Literature*," *CLIO* 21 (1992): 175–176.

of historical writing and thus seemed to inspire disrespect for the cognitive responsibilities of the historian himself. Tropology seemed to blow White's ship out of the safe port of the sciences and onto the treacherous seas of literature and art. *Metahistory* transformed historical writing into literature.

On the other hand, we should recall that Max Black already recognized the significance of metaphor for the sciences; and Mary Hesse even went so far as to assert that concept-formation in the sciences is essentially metaphorical.¹⁴ In other words, when focusing on tropology White happened to single out precisely that aspect of historical writing which one, for good reasons, could say is shared by literature *and* the sciences. This, then, is the ambivalence in White's theory that will preoccupy us for the remainder of this introduction: surely *Metahistory* inaugurated the swing of historical theory toward literature, yet it managed to do so in such a way as not to preclude a scientistic interpretation of historical writing. One might object, at this stage, that the ambivalence is merely apparent. That is to say, arguments like those of Black and Hesse should not be interpreted as an indication of the scientism of metaphor (and, hence, of White's tropology) but rather as an indication that philosophers of science are now prepared to recognize "literary" elements even in the sciences. What we see in the arguments of Black, Hesse, and White is, it might be said, an unequivocal agreement to move *away* from science and *toward* literature. Certainly this objection makes sense. However, in reply to this objection, I now want to point out that in White's own view tropology does not necessarily mean a radical break with science and scientistic cognitive ideals and, moreover, that an independent argument can be conceived to show that tropology even lies at the heart of these scientistic cognitive ideals.

First, with regard to White's own relevant declarations, one of his characteristic assertions is that the only instrument "the historian has for endowing his data with meaning, *of rendering the strange familiar* (my emphasis), the mysterious past comprehensible, are the techniques of *figurative language*."¹⁵ The implication is, clearly, that historical insight and meaning are only possible thanks to the use of the tropes, and that therefore,

14. M. B. Hesse, "Models, Metaphors and Truth," in F. R. Ankersmit and J. J. A. Mooij, eds., *Knowledge and Metaphor*, Dordrecht, 1993.

15. White, *Tropics*, 94. Elsewhere, White writes:

Understanding is a process of rendering the unfamiliar, or the "uncanny" in Freud's sense of that term, familiar; of removing it from the domain of things to be "exotic" and unclassified into one or another domain of experience encoded adequately enough to be felt to be humanly useful, nonthreatening, or simply known by association. This process of understanding can only be tropological in nature, for what is involved in the rendering of the unfamiliar into the familiar is a troping that is generally figurative (White, *Tropics*, 5).

For further elucidation see White, *Tropics*, 86, 88.

precisely tropology can show us how the discipline of history truly is part of the Western, Faustian effort to conquer cognitively the physical and the historical world we live in. In one word, tropology is for history what logic and scientific method are for the sciences. White is even quite specific about how the common ground between history and the sciences has to be defined. He thus hazards the suggestion that each of the four tropes corresponds to one of the four stages that Piaget discovered in the cognitive development of the child. And as this cognitive development is conditional for the possibility of doing scientific research, so the tropes are conditional for the possibility of historical meaning and insight. What is of special interest in this suggestion is the following: As is well known, Piaget's description of the cognitive development of the child is in many ways similar to and to some extent even inspired by Kant's transcendental analysis of the human mind, as expounded in his first *Critique*. I am convinced that the link between tropology and Kantian transcendentalism that is thus hinted at should be taken quite seriously. Indeed, this seems to be in conformity with White's own explicit intentions: he incidentally compares his own tropology with the Kantian enterprise.¹⁶ And still more illustrative of the Kantian character of White's tropology is how White sums up the aims and purposes of his *magnum opus*:

One must try to get behind or beneath the presuppositions which sustain a given type of inquiry [i.e., history] and ask the questions that can be begged in its practice in the interest of determining why this type of inquiry has been designed to solve the problems it characteristically tries to solve. This is what metahistory tries to do. It addresses itself to such questions as, What is the structure of a peculiarly *historical* consciousness? What is the epistemological status of historical explanations, as compared with other kinds of explanation that might be offered to account for the materials with which historians ordinarily deal? What are the possible *forms* of historical representation and what are their bases?¹⁷

Think, furthermore, of the obvious similarities between the way in which the tropes organize historical knowledge and how the manifold of human experience is organized by the Kantian categories of understanding. What becomes clear from all this is that we would be justified in attributing to White (no less than to Dilthey) the wish to develop a quasi-Kantian critique of historical knowledge and to closely associate his own theory of history with that impressive culmination point of Western scientific thought. Apart from the *literarization* of historical writing *Metahistory* is no less an endeavor to provide us with a quasi-Kantian, epistemological investigation of

16. White, *Tropics*, 22. The analogy with Piaget is developed here.

17. White, *Tropics*, 81.

the cognitive foundations that support historical representation and meaning. This, then, is the ambivalence in tropology that no reader of White's earlier work can afford to ignore.

I shall now proceed to consider more closely the equivalence or, at least, the close relationship between Kantian transcendentalism on the one hand and White's tropology on the other. I shall thereby restrict my exposition to metaphor. I am aware that this restriction is not without its problems. Several writers in the recent past have stressed the profound difference between the individual tropes, and it has even been argued that the contrast between modernism and postmodernism coincides with the difference between metaphor and irony.¹⁸ However, it suffices to note here that this is not how the tropes function in White's *Metahistory*. Here the tropes all have comparable cognitive functions—a fact that is reflected by White's insistence that even an internal logic can be discerned in the sequence of the tropes that more or less naturally will lead us from one trope to another (including irony). Within the whole of White's tropology, we will nowhere encounter an insurmountable barrier separating one (or more) tropes from the others.

When focusing exclusively on metaphor, then, the first thing to be noted about metaphor is the following: By proposing that we see one thing in terms of another, metaphor is essentially equivalent to the individuation of a (metaphorical) point of view, from which we are invited to see part of (historical) reality (such is the theory of metaphor that will be adopted throughout this volume).¹⁹ For example, the metaphor "the earth is a spaceship" invites us to see the earth from a point of view that is defined by the interaction (to use Black's terminology) between the concepts *earth* and *spaceship*. It should be observed, next, that this view of metaphor is in fundamental agreement with the main inspiration of Kantian transcendentalism—and this is why metaphor is a continuation of scientific cognitive ideals, rather than being in opposition to them. Or, to be more precise, there are two similarities that we must bear in mind in this connection.

First, the two function, cognitively speaking, in a similar way. For both enable us to *organize* (our knowledge of the chaotic manifold of) the world. Both the transcendental subject and the metaphorical point of view do this organizing by withdrawing themselves from the world that is organized by them. Think of how Kant defined the transcendental subject. On

18. I. Hassan, *The Postmodernism Turn: Essays in Postmodernism Theory and Culture*, (Ohio State University Press, 1987), 91–92.

19. See my *Narrative Logic*, 209–220; and my "Reply to Professor Zagorin," *History and Theory* 29 (1990): 275–297.

the one hand, the transcendental self organizes the chaotic manifold of noumenal reality into a phenomenal reality that is accessible to our understanding. But, on the other hand,

the transcendental self remains forever an unattainable entity, for through this I or me or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thought = x. It is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatever, but can only revolve in a perpetual circle, since my judgment upon it has always already made use of its representation.²⁰

Hence, what we can truthfully say about the transcendental subject only gives us access to its predicates but not to itself. Much the same can be said about the metaphorical point of view. In a brilliant and justly famous essay on what he referred to as the *usure* of metaphor in Western philosophy, Derrida demonstrated that the use of metaphor provides us with an intellectual or mental entity that functions both as an “organizing center” and as a “blind spot,” that is, a spot that *sui generis* cannot be aware of itself.²¹ In order to explicate Derrida’s view of metaphor, let us start with the former part of his claim. Taking once more the metaphor, “the earth is a spaceship,” as our example, it will be obvious that the metaphorical point of view calls for quite a specific organization of the knowledge we have of our ecosystem: the organization must be such that it clarifies the vulnerability of that system. As for the latter part of Derrida’s claim, the point of view necessarily remains a blind spot to itself because of its incapacity to objectify itself (a quality it shares with the transcendental self). For, each attempt at objectification would temporarily require us to abandon the point of view. Points of view obey the logic of the center, and of the center we can say that it cannot be “de-centralized” by looking at it from the perspective of another center, without robbing it of its defining characteristic of being a center. The conclusion follows that, cognitively speaking, the transcendental self and the metaphorical point of view fulfill identical functions. Transcendental philosophy is intrinsically metaphorical, and metaphor intrinsically transcendental.

But there is a second, less formal—but perhaps precisely because of this, even more important—similarity between transcendentalism and metaphor. I said above that White’s tropology was, in White’s own words, in harmony

20. I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith, London, 1978, 331.

21. J. Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, Brighton, 1986, 228. Whereas my argument does not go beyond the (already quite substantial) claim that transcendental philosophy is essentially metaphorical, Derrida makes the more comprehensive claim that *all* philosophy is metaphorical. See also my “Davidson en Derrida over de metafoor,” in R. T. Segers ed., *Visies op cultuur en literatuur*, Amsterdam, 1991, 221–229.

with the Enlightened, Faustian endeavor of the knowing subject to “appropriate” the world or to “familiarize” what is initially experienced as strange and unfamiliar in that world. This striving to familiarize the unfamiliar, to make us “feel at home” in this world, to effect a stoic *oikeiosis* (“attempt to make the unfamiliar familiar”), can also be attributed to both transcendentalism and metaphor. Transcendentalism poses no problems here: the transcendental self transforms noumenal reality into a phenomenal reality that has adapted itself to the structure of the transcendental self. Reality is thus “appropriated” by the transcendental self. Next, the familiarization or appropriation of reality by metaphor is no less pronounced and can even be said to be the actual purpose of metaphor. If we recall our example of metaphor, it is clear that the metaphor is directly related to our attempts to protect the ecosystem against pollution by industry, stockbreeding, transport, and so on. In other words, the metaphor organizes our knowledge of these aspects of our world and it does this in such a way as to enable us to make this world a better and safer place for both ourselves and our children. The metaphor tells us how to fix up “our natural home” (recall the stoic notion of *oikeiosis* just referred to).

Speaking generally, metaphor has been remarkably effective in organizing knowledge in ways that may serve our social and political purposes (and this also explains why the social and the political and, hence, the historical world is metaphor’s favorite domain). Metaphor arguably is the most powerful linguistic instrument we have at our disposal for transforming reality into a world that is adaptable to human aims and purposes. Metaphor “anthropomorphizes” social and sometimes even physical reality and, by doing so, enables us to appropriate and to become familiar with that reality in the true sense of these words. And finally, what is even more suggestive than metaphor’s capacity to make an unfamiliar reality familiar is the fact that metaphor always invites us to see a less familiar system in terms of a more familiar system. Familiarization truly is the heart of metaphor.

Having arrived at this stage, we should note that there is a profound difference between White’s earlier work and the essays that have been collected in *The Content of the Form* (1987), from the point of view of the present discussion. White does not explicate this difference himself, but his apparent change of mind is no less important for that. No reader of *The Content of the Form* can fail to be struck by the fact that the tropes are all but absent from it. A clue to White’s change of mind can be found in what is, in my opinion, the most fascinating essay in the collection: the essay on what White refers to as “the politics of interpretation.” White starts the essay by observing that the development of historical writing since the beginning of the last century can best be seen as a process of *disciplinization*—with all the Foucauldian connotations of that word. White suggests

that this process of disciplinization was far from being that discovery of cognitive innocence for which historians always so strenuously strive. It certainly did not permit historians, for the first time in the history of the discipline, to achieve a "realist" disclosure of the past "as it actually was"—though this undoubtedly had been the hope and expectation of all the historians and philosophers of history who have been involved in the process of disciplinization. To be more precise, it was hoped and expected that disciplinization would permit the historian to correct ideological and political distortions that were believed to be the major obstacle to the "realist" interpretation or representation of the past. White correctly demonstrates the futility of the effort. For, what this "political appeasement" amounted to, in practice, was the universal acceptance of a thoroughly anti-utopian historical writing. And one can say many good and positive things about anti-utopianism, but that it is an *antipolitical* position cannot possibly be maintained.

If, then, disciplinization of historical writing was realized in the last one-and-a-half centuries, and if disciplinization cannot be equated with depoliticization, we shall have to look elsewhere for what transformed history into a discipline. White now considers the suggestion that disciplinization ought to be identified with the attack on rhetoric by the founding fathers of history as a discipline. Eighteenth-century historical writing was still openly rhetorical, and, as Gossman has demonstrated on several occasions, the writing of history was conceived of as being part of the world of letters and literature; the quest for historical truth that was inaugurated in the nineteenth century, and which inspired the disciplinization of historical writing, required the abandonment of rhetorics and literary effect, since these were believed to stand in the way of historical truth.²² However, though White does not say so himself in so many words, derhetorization will not be much more helpful than the option of depoliticization if we wish to grasp the nature of the disciplinization of historical writing. For, as depoliticization in practice resulted in the acceptance of a certain kind of political position, so derhetorization brought about the universal acceptance of a new, but nevertheless, merely *different* kind of rhetoric. Quoting Paolo Valesio, White speaks here of the "rhetoric of antirhetoric."²³

So neither depoliticization nor derhetorization can explain the disciplinization of history in the course of the nineteenth century, and that brings us to White's third and decisive proposal for how to conceive of the disciplinization of historical writing. In conformity with the whole of his theoretical oeuvre, White focuses here once again on narrative and he be-

22. L. Gossman, "Literature and Education," in Gossman, *Between History and Literature*, Cambridge (MA), 1990.

23. White, *Content*, 66.

gins by pointing out that the historian must use his *imagination* if he wishes to integrate the results of his historical research into a historical text: imagination “is operative in the work of the historian at the last stage of his labors, when it becomes necessary to compose a discourse or narrative in which to represent his findings.”²⁴ Needless to say, this is the kind of statement we might have found in *Metahistory* or in *Tropics of Discourse*. The same can be said of White’s assertion that the imagination achieves narrativization by adopting a specific style and that, therefore, our question of the disciplinization of historical writing comes down to the question of “the nature of a disciplined historical style.”²⁵ But when answering that question White makes a move that brings him outside the tropological framework. For, White now relates the issue of the disciplinization of history and of historical style to a dilemma that presented itself in eighteenth-century aesthetics as developed by Burke, Kant, Schiller, and Hegel.

The dilemma White has in mind here is that of the sublime and the beautiful. In aesthetic theory the beautiful was associated with “order,” “sense, meaning and meaningful action”; the sublime, on the other hand, confronts us with what escapes and transcends our attempts to impose meaning and, therefore, in the words of Schiller, with “the terrifying spectacle of change which destroys everything and creates it anew and destroys again.”²⁶ The terrifying spectacle of a continuous creation and destruction brings us to a realm that lies beyond our cognitive, historical, and political grasp and that successfully resists all our attempts to master it intellectually. To put it in the terminology that I have been using in this introduction, the beautiful is what can be intellectually *appropriated* by means of the tropes and lends itself willingly to our attempts at tropological *appropriation*; the sublime both escapes and even undoes our most strenuous efforts at appropriation. White himself uses the word *domestication* instead of *appropriation* and formulates the contrast between the beautiful and the sublime in the following way: Historical facts are “domesticated [in terms of the beautiful] precisely insofar as they are removed from displaying any aspect of the sublime that Schiller attributed to them in his essay of 1801.”²⁷ This, then, is what according to White essentially was at stake in the process of the disciplinization of historical writing: a striving for a taming, domestication, or appropriation of history by stripping the past from everything that might not fit into the tropological explanatory patterns that Western man has devised for making sense of sociohistorical reality. Obviously, we are tempted to exclaim that we could not possibly expect his-

24. White, *Content*, 67.

25. White, *Content*, 68.

26. White, *Content*, 69.

27. White, *Content*, 72.

torical writing to do anything else; what else could we expect from the historian's text than that it succeeds in making an unfamiliar past familiar to us? Put differently, how could we possibly refrain from making use of figurative language since metaphor and figurative language are our *ultima ratio* in the task of transforming the unfamiliar into the familiar? However, it is precisely this category of the sublime that reminds us that the tropological appropriation of the past is not the only option that is open to the historian: representation—and even historical representation—leaves the historian the possibility of presenting the terrifying strangeness and sublimity of the past to his readers.

I will not enter into a discussion of the plausibility of White's view that the disciplinization of historical writing mainly consisted in an exchange of the sublime for the beautiful in historical representation. Surely many historians who wrote during the centuries before the disciplinization of historical writing in the nineteenth century felt little affinity with the historical sublime. And yet, historians like Gibbon, Carlyle, and Michelet, who are in White's eyes the last great historians before the disciplinization of history took place, undoubtedly preserved an instinct for the historical sublime. It is true that after them the past became more common, more domesticated, more a variant of an eternal present. In the wake of institutional and socioeconomic historians, bourgeois rationality has been projected onto the strangest and remotest pasts, and hermeneutic theorists like Collingwood or Dray have offered a compelling and, to many historians and historical theorists, convincing justification of this effort at domestication. But the following is of more interest: When White favorably contrasts the historical sublime with the beautiful (and with tropology), this is self-evidently a move against tropology, but, at the same time, it is a move merely *within* but not *against* Kantian transcendentalism. For, as White amply points out himself, the sublime still has its logical place within the schematism of the Kantian system. Within the overall architecture of Kantian criticism the beautiful neatly corresponds to the categories of understanding (*Verstand*), while the sublime is on a par with the higher faculty of reason (*Vernunft*). Within the Kantian system, the experience of the sublime can therefore be explained as the experience of a reality effectively resisting subsumption within the categories of the understanding.²⁸ And insofar as this is a reality lying outside the grasp of those categories, the experience of the sublime could, in a no less Kantian manner, be described as the experience of a noumenal reality. Hence, though the sublime surely does test the Kantian system to its limits, the sublime can still be accounted for within Kantian assumptions. Thus, to put it metaphorically, White's obvious fascination with those aspects of the past that

28. As is explained by White himself. See White, *Content*, 70.

resist domestication has provoked him to rattle at the doors of Kantian criticism, but has not yet shown him the way out of that well-ordered house of Kantian transcendentalism.²⁹

In the remainder of this introduction, I want to pursue the path suggested by White's transition from the kind of views that were presented in *Metahistory* to those we may find in his *Content of the Form*. That is to say, following White, I want to explore the possibilities and the nature of a form of historical writing that breaks with the Kantian, Enlightened tradition that always strove for a domestication or appropriation of the past. However, in contrast to White, I shall try to do so by attempting to effectively break the spell of Kantian, transcendentalist patterns of argument. My motivation for looking for an anti- or a-Kantian argumentation will be obvious: in the foregoing, we have seen that the intellectual function of both transcendentalism and of metaphor has always been to effect an appropriation of the relevant parts of reality. Hence, the avoidance of appropriation in our approach to reality can only have a chance of success to

29. With all the more interest we may turn to another antitropological movement that can be discerned in *The Content of the Form*. In the last chapter of the collection, White distinguishes between a "linguistic theory of the text" and a "specifically semiological conception of it," and it is clear that his sympathies lie with the latter. A linguistic theory of the text is a theory "that takes specifically lexical and grammatical categories as elements in its analytical model" and can best be associated with the kind of work that has been done by Russell, Wittgenstein, Austin, or Chomsky. Next, the semiological model is described by White as follows:

A semiological perspective, on the other hand, treats the text less as an effect of causes more basic or as a reflection, however refracted, of a structure more fundamental than as a complex mediation between various codes by which reality is to be assigned possible meanings. It seeks, first of all, to identify the hierarchy of codes that is established in the process of the text's elaboration, in which one or more emerge as seemingly self-evident, obvious, natural ways of making sense of the world. (White, *Content*, 202.)

It will be obvious that this semiological view of the origin of (historical) meaning owes a lot to Barthes's notion of myth as developed in the latter's *Mythologies*.

We will note, therefore, in White's sympathy for the semiological model another instance of his ambivalent attitude toward the Enlightenment tradition. For, on the one hand, Barthes's notion of myth underlying the passage just quoted is profoundly anti-Kantian. The opacity of language that is presupposed by both White's semiological theory of the text and Barthes's notion of myth would be as alien to Kantianism as the suggestion of the fundamental and unavoidable opacity of the Kantian categories. It is exactly the purpose of so essential a part of the first *Critique* as the transcendental deduction of the categories to show the transparency of the categories and why the categories of the understanding form a reliable foundation of scientific knowledge and truth. On the other hand, Barthes proposed the notion of myth in order to demonstrate how language can be even more successful in appropriating reality than we are ordinarily aware of—and the same would be true of White's semiological model of the text.

the extent that we know how to resist the temptations of transcendentalism and of metaphor. I want to emphasize, furthermore, that my interest in the development of a non-Kantian theory of history that avoids appropriation is more than an invitation to solve some intriguing intellectual puzzle. One may think here of the following four considerations: First, as is demonstrated by White's own position, because Kantian transcendentalism is so intimately and closely related to the movement toward appropriation, the effort to *avoid* appropriation will necessarily require, within the Kantian system, some quite radical and dramatic steps. So much is already clear from White's introduction of a category such as the historical sublime and of what he associated with that in the course of his argument.³⁰ Speaking generally, this is the hidden danger of all Kantianism: it accommodates so much, is so much in tune with all the rationalist tendencies in Western thought, and is so much the epitome of all our cognitive efforts at mastery of the world that it cannot fail to give a tremendous radicalist impetus to each attempt to step outside its sphere of influence. One is reminded here of the image of an extremely heavy mass, such as the sun, and how it may enormously accelerate the speed of objects entering its gravitational field. It seems worthwhile, then, to investigate whether we can attain White's goal with the help of more modest instruments.

This brings me to my second consideration. I shall argue in the last chapters of this collection that several variants within contemporary history of mentalities can be interpreted as implementing the movement against appropriation. Needless to say, these recent forms of historical writing have nothing of the extremism that is (unavoidably) part of White's Kantian conception of the historical sublime. We may expect, next, that developing such a non-Kantian historical theory against appropriation may help us better understand what actually is at stake in the variants of the history of mentalities that I have in mind. I am convinced that we should not credit these new variants with merely having discovered a number of new potential topics of historical investigation, though that is true as well. The history of mentalities—at least some of it—is much more than that. For, it should primarily be seen as a break with most of the historical writing that was produced in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries insofar as it always aimed at the appropriation of the past, at rendering familiar what was considered unfamiliar and strange in our past and was in this way part of the Enlightened, Kantian enterprise.

A third consideration directly follows from this one. Appropriation was the primary goal of all the cognitive efforts within the several scientific disciplines that have come into being since the Enlightenment. From this perspective the significance of the history of mentalities, as conceived here,

30. White, *Content*, 74–75.

must not be restricted to historical writing. We have all become so Kantian that we find it hard, if not impossible, to think of a discipline that does not aim at appropriation. Obviously, if we *can* discern an example of an actually existing disciplinary practice (hence, no mere theoretical model) that contradicts or does not fit within the all-encompassing Kantian tradition, such an example may function as an entryway into a new intellectual world that is so difficult for us to imagine because of our being conditioned by the Kantian paradigm of knowledge and meaning. It is here that contemporary historical writing—not unlike the historicism of the end of the eighteenth century—may give us an inkling of the new intellectual universe that lies ahead of us.

Fourth, and last, the non-Kantian model of a form of historical understanding which does not aim at appropriation is the background of the present collection when taken as a whole. Whereas the first four chapters still operate on the basis of Kantian assumptions, the last three chapters—though each in a different way—explore the possibilities of such a non-Kantian, nonmetaphorical form of historical writing and of historical consciousness. This is why this collection could be said to give an exposition of both the rise and the fall of metaphor in historical writing, as is implied in its title.

If, then, we consider this project of developing the rough outlines of an alternative to a Kantian theory of history, we should begin with the recognition that Kantian transcendentalism is primarily a theory of *experience* and of how experience is transformed into *knowledge*. So historical experience, the experience of the past, will be our natural point of departure. At first sight, the appropriateness of this aperture seems to facilitate our enterprise considerably. For, a good deal of existing theory of history possesses the characteristics of a theory of historical experience. Hence, we may expect that existing historical theory will offer us some useful clues. Yet, on closer inspection, it quickly becomes clear that we have been too optimistic in hoping that existing historical theory might function as a useful guide. The first problem we encounter is that most of contemporary historical theory is based on the assumption that the past can never be an object of experience, for the simple but decisive reason that experience always takes place in the present and that an experience of the past is therefore ruled out almost by definition. Admittedly, the historian may base his knowledge of the past on an experience of what the past has left us—such as documents, archaeological findings, works of art, and so on—but these are the *sources* of historical knowledge of the past and not the past *itself*. Naturally, the constructivist thesis (defended, for example, by L. J. Goldstein) owes its plausibility to this fact about the origin and nature of historical knowledge.

However, we need not be completely discomfited by the encounter of

this first obstacle. For, we may remember now that both German and Anglo-Saxon hermeneutics (one can think of the names of Droysen, Dilthey, Collingwood, or Dray) often have the pretension of offering us a theoretical account of the historian's experience of the past itself and not merely of material from the past that has survived into the present. As is well known, it was Dilthey's philosophical program to develop a quasi-Kantian theory of historical knowledge and to construct a theory of historical experience of physical reality. But once again, a closer inspection will undeceive us. For, if I am permitted a ruthless simplification, what we will discover in German and Anglo-Saxon hermeneutics is the following: Their argument ordinarily unfolds in two steps. First, an account is given of how the historical agent experienced the historical *Umwelt* in which he lived. The second step is a philosophical analysis of how the historian may actually copy the historical agent's experience of his past world. Though hermeneuticists often differed with regard to the extent that a reconstruction of the agent's experience is actually possible, the truth is that this *copying* of experience rather than experience (of the past) *itself* was what hermeneuticists were mainly interested in. And the conclusion seems to follow that hermeneutics aimed for the elimination of historical experience rather than for recognizing its significance and accounting for it.

One may object at this stage that this is an unfair appraisal of hermeneutics since copying historical experience is a *reenactment* of historical experience and therefore no different from actual experience itself. But this objection ignores the hidden agenda of hermeneutic theory. We can get a glimpse of this hidden agenda by recalling Ranke's well-known dictum that the historian "should wipe himself out" when representing the past—a dictum that was echoed in Fustel de Coulanges's equally well-known exclamation: "Gentlemen, it is not I, but history that is speaking to you!" and in Michelet's saying that the historical text (at least *his* text) is a "resurrection" of the past. Of course, I am not implying that Ranke, Fustel de Coulanges, and Michelet should be seen as precursors of hermeneutics (though Ranke certainly wrote and thought in a kindred intellectual atmosphere). But what their words eloquently express is telling and may give us the proper hint for how to interpret hermeneutic theory as just described. For, what is present in all these views and what permeates so much of historical theory, hermeneutic or not, that has been produced since the beginning of the previous century, is a deep and ineradicable distrust of historical experience. The omnipresent, tacit assumption always is that the historian's *own* experience of the past will unavoidably lead to subjectivity, to a distortion of the past and to the illegitimate interposition of the historian himself between the past and the reader of his text. The historian must completely disappear from the text; the text should be a kind of epiphany of the past that has miraculously come about without the inter-

vention of the historians. And this requires, above all, the radical elimination of the dimension of the historian's own experience of the past. In fact, this is precisely the main point of the hermeneuticist's hidden agenda. For, when he assigns to the historian the task of copying the *historical agent's* experience of his historical world, this undoubtedly is the most effective way of getting rid of the historian's own experience of the past and replacing it by a more palatable alternative. Hence, historical theory, as exemplified by hermeneutic theory, presents us with the amazing spectacle of a theory founding a purportedly scientific discipline while denying this science its experiential basis. Many of the strange extremisms that we may find in the history of historical theory (no theory of an academic discipline moves so easily from an extreme of realism to an extreme of idealism) originate in this denial of the dimension of historical experience.

However, the resources of hermeneutic theory may not yet be exhausted by the foregoing. For the following three reasons, it is especially the name of Gadamer that may now come to mind. First, Gadamer is quite explicit about the paramount importance of a suitable and well-informed theory of historical experience and of the urgency for a satisfactory philosophy of historical interpretation to develop such a theory. Second, Gadamer's own theory of historical experience is self-avowedly anti-Kantian. For, it is his most original and most serious objection—to both the historians and to hermeneuticists like Dilthey—that for all their rhetoric about the autonomy of the historical understanding within the whole of the sciences, they nevertheless unwittingly accepted Enlightenment's notions about the nature of knowledge and the scientistic ideals of the Enlightenment that went with these notions. Moreover, according to Gadamer, the historians and the hermeneuticists carried the Enlightenment project even further than the philosophers of the Enlightenment themselves had ever dared and hoped to do: if eighteenth-century epistemologists had been notoriously indifferent to the effort to conquer the historical world,³¹ historians and hermeneuticists devised highly effective means for improving upon their Enlightenment predecessors. In short, historism is not an *attack* on the Enlightenment (as the historians themselves believed) but, in fact, the *continuation* of the Enlightenment, with far more effective historian methods.³² By exchanging the epistemological effort, that had been shared by the Enlightenment and the historians, for a Heideggerian ontology of *Verstehen*, Gadamer hoped to emancipate the notion of historical ex-

31. Of course, this is a caricature of the eighteenth-century historical consciousness that had already been exposed as such by Meinecke in his book on the origins of historism.

32. H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming, New York, 1986, 239–240.

perience from its Kantian heritage and to free historical theory of its transcendentalism. That is also why Rorty discovered in Gadamer his most useful ally in his attack on the epistemological tradition in the history of Western thought since Descartes. Third, Gadamer is quite clear about his Aristotelian inspiration. Since the epistemological tradition, just mentioned, was mainly a rejection of Aristotelian conceptions, indeed the most obvious thing to do for a philosopher questioning the epistemological tradition is to start with a reconsideration of Aristotelianism: if we discover that we are on the wrong route, then we had best retrace our route back to the last junction. It certainly is to be regretted that Rorty never felt the urge to do so.

With regard to this third point, Bernstein even goes so far as to say that "Gadamer's own understanding of philosophic hermeneutics can itself be interpreted as a series of footnotes in his decisive intellectual encounter with Aristotle,"³³ and he goes on to explain that Gadamer's rejection of transcendentalism in favor of a "peculiar interlacing of being and knowledge"³⁴ is profoundly indebted to Aristotle. For it is the Aristotelian concept of *phronèsis* in terms of which this fusion of being and knowledge is achieved. *Phronèsis*, the knowledge of how to act and do the ethically right thing, is described by Gadamer as follows: "for moral being, as Aristotle describes it, is clearly not objective knowledge, ie the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes, but he is directly affected by what he sees. It is something that he has to do."³⁵ Ethical knowledge is not knowledge of an objective reality outside ourselves but can only be operative on the assumption of a fusion of knowledge and the world. Here we observe how (by means of the Aristotelian concept of *phronèsis*) all the Kantian demarcations between epistemology and ontology, between knowledge and being, even between the true and the good, as well as between the transcendental self and what is seen from the perspective of the transcendental self, become blurred. The conclusion seems obvious: Gadamer may well be our best guide when we are looking to develop an alternative to a Kantian theory of historical experience.

Needless to say, it would be impossible to do justice in the framework of this introduction to all the subtlety, the richness, and the complexity of Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics, and I shall therefore have to restrict myself to merely one necessarily incomplete comment about why I believe that Gadamer will nevertheless *not* provide us with the theory of historical experience that we are looking for here. My comment has to do with the use that Gadamer makes of Aristotle. As may already have become clear

33. R. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivity and Relativism*, Oxford, 1983, 146.

34. Ibid.

35. Gadamer, *Truth*, 281.

from the preceding discussion, Gadamer is mainly interested in Aristotle's ethics. Thus, in the chapter of *Truth and Method* that is explicitly devoted to "the hermeneutic relevance of Aristotle," Gadamer begins with the statement:

Understanding is, then, a particular case of the application of something universal to a particular situation. This makes Aristotelian ethics of special importance for us—we considered it briefly in the introductory remarks on the theory of the human sciences.³⁶

What interests Gadamer in Aristotle's ethics is what Aristotle says about the *application* of ethical rules to the context within which we have to act. Gadamer thus emphasizes, as does Aristotle, that ethical action always involves *epieikeia*, that is to say, a completion or perfection of the—in themselves, incomplete—ethical rules ("correction of the law")³⁷ by applying them to a given context. And the same emphasis on application can be found in Gadamer's account of how we experience the past when we are interpreting a text that is handed down to us by the past. Here Gadamer wishes to draw our attention to the fact that how we experience the text and its meaning cannot be dissociated from the question of what the text means *to us* in our *present situation*, that is, how the text *applies* to us and to our own world. And if this is true for us, this is no less so for previous and future interpreters of the text. Our interpretation of the text is, therefore, part of what Gadamer refers to as a *Wirkungsgeschichte*, that is, part of a history of the interpretation of a text, and that history has its coherence in how the text was applied to different historical situations in the course of time. I have no argument with these views of Gadamer and am convinced that the notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* is decisive in undermining the pretensions of the Kantian, epistemological hermeneutics that preceded Gadamer.

Nevertheless, Gadamer's emphasis on Aristotelian ethics, on application, and on *Wirkungsgeschichte* unfortunately disqualifies his hermeneutics as a guide for the kind of theory on historical experience that we are looking for. The main datum here is that Gadamer's hermeneutics present historical experience—and that is, for Gadamer, the way in which we experience, read, and interpret a text—primarily as a phase in an interpretation history, in a *Wirkungsgeschichte*, and precisely because of this, it cannot count as a historical experience, as an experience of the past. To put it succinctly, Gadamer is interested in the historicity of experience (*die Geschichtlichkeit des Verstehens*) and *not* in the experience of historicity (*die Erfahrung der Geschichtlichkeit*).³⁸ The past gives way here to the interpretative texts

36. Gadamer, *Truth*, 278.

37. Gadamer, *Truth*, 284.

38. Gadamer, *Truth*, 235.

that have been written about it, and the locus of historical experience is transposed from the text itself to its interpretation. Much as this may present us with a plausible description of what actually happens in intellectual history or in the history of philosophy, the authenticity that we naturally associate with the notion of historical experience will be lost and unaccounted for if we follow Gadamer.

Two lessons can be derived from our discussion of Gadamer. First, the foregoing will have made sufficiently clear that Aristotle is not only an obvious but also a useful guide in our search for an anti-Kantian theory of historical experience. Second, when we are looking to Aristotle for help, we should not concentrate on his ethics, since ethics is by its nature present-centered and therefore an unsuitable point of departure for our enterprise; because of the role application plays in both *Verstehen* and in ethical practice, Gadamer was tempted to model the former after the latter and thus lost his grip on historical experience. I therefore propose to consider what Aristotle said in *De Anima* about sensation and knowledge: application has no role to play there. Yet, perhaps the most appropriate thing to say about *De Anima* is that it does not develop a theory of knowledge and experience in the proper sense of the word. Indeed, the kind of concepts epistemologists currently use, like *truth*, *knowledge* or *justified, true belief*, *reference* or *meaning*, are largely absent from Aristotle's writings, and even when he does use them he does so in a way that is quite different from what we are accustomed to in epistemology. Paradoxically, this is a good omen. For, it suggests that in turning to the intellectual world of Aristotle we necessarily pass from one philosophical paradigm to another, and nothing short of a paradigm-change will be required if we want to outline an anti-Kantian theory of historical experience.

Indeed, if we consider Aristotle's view of sensation, we will observe at once that the kind of questions we have learned to ask with regard to contemporary theories of knowledge and experience are irrelevant here. When describing sensation, Aristotle uses the following suggestive metaphor: "we must understand as true generally of every sense that sense is which is receptive of the form of sensible objects without the matter just as the wax receives the impression of the signet ring without the iron or the gold."³⁹ What becomes clear from this metaphor is that the whole drift of Aristotle's conception of experience and knowledge is diametrically opposed to the modernist one we have been accustomed to since Descartes and Kant. For, the purpose of the metaphor is to suggest a maximum of *continuity* (both epistemically and ontologically, as we would nowadays say) between the object of perception and sensation or the act of perception;

39. Aristotle, *De Anima II*, XII, 424 a 16ff.

the identity qua form of the signet ring and the impression it makes in the wax produces this suggestion of continuity. This suggestion is further reinforced by Aristotle's conception of sensation as a continuous chain of causal processes whose principal links are the perceived object, an intermediate sphere, and the perceiver.

Contrast this to how the Cartesian methodological doubt and Cartesian metaphysics created an almost unbridgeable gap between mind and knowledge on the one hand and the world on the other, or to how epistemology was given the self-contradictory task of building an epistemological bridge over an essentially ontological cleft between subject and object, between language and the world, or to how sense data are for the epistemologist mere signs for the existence of states of affairs in reality, or to how all this effected a radical separation between the world and the mind, which remains firmly locked up within its *forum internum*, and we will come to see that no gap could be deeper than the one between the Aristotelian and the Kantian transcendentalist paradigms of experience. It is the essence of Aristotle's argument that we should not conceive of sense-experience as essentially problematic because of what I have just referred to as the continuity between perceived object and perception. And yet, the main consequence of epistemological thought has always been precisely to problematize the certainties that sense-experience seems to offer. One might go even one step further and argue with Lear that according to Aristotle there is not only a continuity but even an identity of perception and the object of perception. I would like to refer here to Lear's comments on Aristotle's account of the perception of sound. In his recent book on Aristotle's theory of knowledge and experience, Lear reminds us that the Greek word for sound (*psophos*) can refer both to sound in the world itself, as when, for example, a tree crashes to the ground *and* to the perceptive activity of the listener when hearing the sound. And, indeed, for Aristotle perception and what is perceived *are* the same "as we can call the very same activity 'either the builder building' or 'the house being built.'"⁴⁰ Since Aristotle believed that the mind worked in much the same way as the sense faculties, a roughly similar story can be told for knowledge. Mind is a faculty that has the *potentiality* (in the technical sense Aristotle attributes to that word) of taking on the forms of what is known and of what the mind understands: "contemplating consists in the mind actually *becoming* the object of thought." Lear hastens to add, though, that these objects of thought are the "objects which involve no matter or, literally, things without matter."⁴¹ Hence, forms, experience, and knowledge

40. J. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, Cambridge, 1988, 106–107.

41. Lear, *Aristotle*, 124.

do not separate us from the world—in the sense of giving rise to the epistemological question as to how the two are related—but unite us with the world.

Aristotle's relevant views can be summed up as follows: The dissociation of subject and object that is so characteristic of all transcendentalist and epistemological thought since Descartes is absent in Aristotle. Whereas the transcendentalist subject familiarizes the world outside us, in the sense that it transforms the world after its own image, perception as conceived by Aristotle shows the opposite tendency since the mind, in this case, takes on the form of the objects of the outside world. But this is not a matter of the mind being overwhelmed by the (forms of the) objects in reality; the mind has to activate its *potentiality* in order to take on these forms effectively if these objects are to be perceived. The image comes to mind of a string that has the potentiality to actually resonate with the sound of a certain pitch. And to pursue this metaphor: the mind could be compared to a string that can change its length in order to ensure resonance. One might now object that Aristotle had only sensory perception in mind, and, furthermore, that the transition from sensory perception to the experience of the past that is at stake in the present discussion is far from obvious. It is therefore a most happy coincidence that Freud, in one of his writings, worked with much the same metaphor as Aristotle; combining the use Aristotle and Freud made of the metaphor in question will enable us to continue Aristotle's argument in the desired direction.

I am thinking here of Freud's note in which he compares the perceptual apparatus of our mind ("unser seelisches Wahrnehmungsapparat")⁴² to a mystic writing pad. The issue here is how our life experiences are taken up in our psyche and thus form our psychological history. Like the wax tablet of Aristotle's metaphor that receives the form of the signet ring, the wax of the mystic writing pad receives the imprint of the stylus that has been used for writing on it. And as with Aristotle's theory of experience, we can observe in the case of Freud's writing pad an identity of form between the movement that was made with the stylus and its impression on the wax of the block. And this identity of form is certainly not accidental to Freud's metaphor. For, as Freudian psychoanalysis amply demonstrates, there ordinarily is a striking similarity between the behavior of the neurotic, insofar as this behavior is expressive of the remembrance of a certain traumatic experience in the neurotic's past, and that traumatic experience itself. The experience itself and the way this experience imprints itself in the psyche of the neurotic are structurally alike, or, at least, closely related; the analogy with Aristotle's theory of sensation is obvious.

42. S. Freud, "The Mystic Writing Pad," in Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19, London, 1961, 232.

No less interesting is another parallel between what one might call the psychoanalytical experience of the past and the writing pad. The writing pad consists of three layers. On the bottom we have the wax itself. The wax is covered, first, by a thin plastic sheet that makes contact with the wax at those places where one has been writing and it is in this way that the message that is written on the pad articulates itself. On top of this sheet there is another, thicker plastic sheet, which protects the one underneath and on which one actually writes. What struck Freud is that when the two plastic sheets are removed, the message that had been inscribed on the pad will become invisible. Yet, Freud adds, "But it is easy to discover that the permanent trace of what was written [*die Dauerspüre des Geschriebenen*] is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in suitable lights."⁴³ This fact about the writing pad invites Freud to see the wax as analogous to the unconscious and the two plastic sheets as analogous to what he referred to as conscious systems. What becomes clear from this is that when we look at the writing pad, under certain circumstances, with the appropriate lighting, we see the message that has been inscribed on it, which later became invisible and which we may therefore have forgotten about. Similarly, there must be an experience of our psychological past that has the characteristics of a discovery, without our being aware of it, of what has always been a true part of our psychological constitution. And of such a discovery we may say that it is not a matter of an appropriation or a domestication of an intrinsically alien reality. For, the movement is quite the reverse: we are confronted here with a part of ourselves that appears to have acquired an *uncanny* independence from us in the course of time. This is not a familiarization of the unfamiliar, but a defamiliarization of the familiar: at our very heart, we have become strangers to ourselves. Here, then, we may discover the formal difference between the experience of the past along Aristotelian-Freudian lines and the transcendentalist, metaphorical conception of experience.

Few philosophers nowadays will be prepared to defend the Aristotelian-Freudian theory of experience and knowledge. Yet I am convinced that it is only a theory such as this that will enable us to make sense of how we experience our personal and cultural past; the kind of theories of experience that are *en vogue* since the Enlightenment are, in my view, utterly incapable of accounting for how the historical past is experienced both by individuals or individual historians and by the relevant intellectual or cultural communities. What is given us in and by historical experience is not in need of decoding, but should be understood as having formed us in the Aristotelian sense of the word. Perhaps the most convincing and most decisive proof of this incapacity is that philosophers of history have not even

43. Freud, "Mystic Writing Pad," 230.

thought it necessary to develop a theory of historical experience and—as we have seen—have always been strangely acquiescent in (tacitly) conceiving of history as a discipline in which the experience of the objects studied in that discipline counts for nothing.

I must concede, however, that a similar reproach could be addressed to some of the essays that are included in this collection. In fact, it is here that one might situate the plot that underlies this collection as a whole. If the collection could be said to tell a story, it would be the story of how to move from a metaphorical, transcendentalist conception of history to the Aristotelian-Freudian conception of historical writing. The first chapter gives a short enumeration of all the doctrines that I hold to be of central importance to traditional, Kantian narrativism and to the transcendentalist role played in it by metaphor and tropology in general. Chapters 2 and 3 add some further details to the picture and suggest how a narrativist philosophy of history can emphasize its independence from scientific patterns of argument while, at the same time, remaining safely within the circumspections of “Kantian” argument. From chapter 4 the argument tends to move outside the Kantian framework. Thus in chapters 4 and 5 an aestheticist view of historical writing is set in opposition to the transcendentalist approach. That aestheticism is a challenge to transcendentalism is not difficult to explain. If we compare reality itself to its aesthetic representation by the painter—and obviously this is the point of departure of all aesthetics—exactly the same epistemological problems we encounter with regard to reality itself will repeat themselves with regard to its aesthetic representation. Epistemology is indifferent to the question of whether we are dealing with reality or with its aesthetic representation: both belong unproblematically to the inventory of phenomenal reality. Hence, if we ask for the relation of reality and its pictorial representation, transcendentalism is *sui generis* incapable of yielding helpful insights.

But if the aestheticist approach to historical writing merely suggests the irrelevance of transcendentalism rather than an outright rejection of it, in the last two chapters transcendentalism is attacked on its own ground, that is to say, insofar as transcendentalism offers no account of (historical) experience. This attack is not inspired by theoretical considerations but by what is suggested by the actual practice of contemporary history of mentalities. (It is, incidentally, part of the argument in chapter 5 that historical theory should not look for the epistemological *foundations* of historical writing but reflect on the unexpected and sometimes fascinating philosophical problems that are occasioned by the *results* of contemporary historical writing.) In chapters 4 through 7 I try to demonstrate that the contemporary practice of the history of mentalities—or at least some of its variants—actually amounts to an overthrow of what previous forms of historical writing, and their transcendentalist legitimation by historicist or posi-

tivist historical theory, accepted as the self-evident hierarchy of the important and the unimportant in sociohistorical reality.⁴⁴ Metaphor has always required the historian and his audience to attribute importance to what easily lends itself to metaphorical organization (see above) from the point of view suggested by a specific metaphor—whether embodied in the idea of the nation state, of an intellectual movement, of a social class, et cetera. And the knowledge gained by historical research that resisted this organization by the metaphorical point of view had to be regarded as irrelevant and unimportant. In this way the metaphorical dimension that has always been present in transcendentalist historical theory presented the historian with fairly reliable criteria of the important and the unimportant. Since these criteria could be applied in a more or less general way and were often used by historians to that effect, we may find here the origin of historical writing as an academic discipline uniting many historians in a common effort to describe and explain the past.

But one of the most striking features of the history of mentalities is that it is largely indifferent to this hierarchy of the important and the unimportant; it no longer has the pretension of presenting us with those elements or aspects of the past in terms of which an entire part of the past ought to be understood (as invariably is the message of all historical writing informed by any of the tropes). Hence, what the history of mentalities achieved was not merely the exchange of one set of important historical topics for another (this has, for example, been the accomplishment of Marxist historical writing) but the disruption of the very idea of such a hierarchy of the important and the unimportant. Whether we think of the *micro-storie*, of *Alltagsgeschichte*, or of deconstructivist intellectual and cultural history, in all cases we witness a revolt (the political connotations of this word are quite appropriate with regard to the victory of the “democratic” detail over “aristocratic” essence that is at stake here) of the marginal against the important, without, however, the marginal ever aspiring to take the place of the historian’s or the positivist’s categories of the important. The development of historian or positivist historical writing into contemporary history of mentalities may thus show us how the rise and fall of metaphor were realized in actual historical practice.

In the last two chapters several of the threads spun in the previous ones are brought together. For several reasons my argument in these last chapters can best be seen from the point of view of hermeneutic theory as previously discussed. First, my argument shares with hermeneutic theory an interest in the category of historical experience. Second, the postmod-

44. For an extended analysis of this disruption of the hierarchy of the important and the unimportant, see my “Twee vormen van narrativisme,” in F. R. Ankersmit, *De navel van de geschiedenis: Over interpretatie, representatie en historische realiteit*, Groningen, 1990, 44–78.

ernist theory of history expounded in the last chapter is a self-professed radicalization of classical historicism and is developed by carrying Gadamer's hermeneutics a step further. But more important is a third consideration. One might say that hermeneutics has always been an uncomfortable compromise between transcendentalism and Aristotelianism. Hermeneutics is strongly reminiscent of Aristotelianism in that all its many (German and Anglo-Saxon) variants have always strived for a certain identification of the historian with his object (Collingwood's reenactment theory is, of course, exemplary); this reminds one of Aristotle's argument that contemplation should aim for the mind's actually "becoming" the object that is contemplated. But this aim would necessarily remain an unattainable goal since, in accordance with transcendentalism, the object was, in the end, always conceived of as an intellectual construction by the historian's mind. I am not imputing idealism to transcendentalism here—though the affinity between the two will need no clarification, either by way of argument or history—but have in mind transcendentalism's tendency to erect an epistemological and ontological barrier between language or knowledge and the world and transcendentalism's permanent effort to firmly encapsulate the mind in the former. Because of this ultimate unattainability of the historical object, the relationship between subject and object in hermeneutic theory necessarily becomes a matter of copying (see above) rather than of identification. The persistence of the transcendentalist temptation is demonstrated by the fact that even such a staunch antitranscendentalist as Gadamer at times yielded to it. As becomes clear from his emphasis on *application* and *Wirkungsgeschichte* and from his preference of Aristotle's ethics to the theory of sensory perception expounded in *De Anima*, even Gadamer has a tendency to favor the subject over the object and its historical context, and, because of that, his hermeneutics still bears the unmistakable traces of transcendentalism and of how the transcendental self organizes the world after its own image.

In order to circumvent these pitfalls of hermeneutic theory, a new theory of historical experience is developed in the last chapter. This theory of historical experience is required, first of all, to fill in the ditches that transcendentalism dug in Aristotle's notion of experience and knowledge. This theory of historical experience must, furthermore, recognize the authenticity of historical experience as a token of its willingness to abandon the pretensions of the transcendental self to familiarize the (historical) world in the manner that has always been peculiar to the transcendental self. The notion of *historical sensation* as described by Goethe, Meinecke, and Huizinga enables us to get a clearer view of what is involved in historical experience as described here. Next, the nostalgic experience of the past is proposed as the matrix for a satisfactory analysis of historical expe-

rience. Nostalgia can serve as such a matrix because it is not the experience of a reified, objective reality out there, but of a *difference* (between the present and the past): since difference demands the presence of *both* present and past, it allows for this flowing together of subject and object that is so essential in Aristotle's theory of perception. A curious corollary is that the kind of historical consciousness that is exemplified by this form of historical experience is strongly suggestive of a movement of withdrawal: what is experienced historically is a *former* part of ourselves that in the course of time has acquired a certain independence with regard to ourselves. Part of ourselves was permitted to develop an autonomous existence and, apparently, we have withdrawn from it at some stage. So, once again, we are surrounded by nature but, this time, by a nature that was once part of ourselves and from which we have now become estranged. This, then, is what we see when we look in the mirror of the past: we look at ourselves and see a stranger. Contrary to Vico's intuitions, we may therefore write: "Verum et factum *non* convertuntur": the historical world is an *Other* precisely because it is a human artifact.

As will be clear from the foregoing, the greatest debt I owe is to Hayden White. The essays in this collection are mainly ramblings through the intellectual fields surrounding the route he had already mapped out in his writings of the last two decades. His capacity for identifying what really demands our attention at each phase of the intellectual debate on historical writing is, in my opinion, the most formidable asset in the possession of contemporary philosophy of history. There are other American colleagues of mine—especially Hans Kellner and Allan Megill—whose ideas and suggestions are also present throughout these essays. They have functioned for me as a kind of *reality principle*: the conversations and the correspondence that I had with them taught me to distinguish between mere theoretical fantasy and what I might say with at least a semblance of plausibility. Returning to this side of the Atlantic, I am no less grateful for the advice that I received from my closest colleagues here in Groningen: Josine Blok, Jaap den Hollander, Ernst Kossmann, and Wessel Krul, and from Ann Rigney in Utrecht. For the enrichment of my intellectual background, I owe my gratitude to the members of the Amsterdam group, led by Theo de Boer, for the Foundations of the Humanities.

Anthony Runia has protected the text from the dangers occasioned by my uncertain and limited grasp of the English language. His accuracy, his sensitivity for semantic nuance and, above all, his readiness to go beyond the mere words and to penetrate into and think over the argument itself, are a more solid guarantee for a correct and comprehensible text than I had ever dared to hope for. A very special debt I owe to Machteld

Strabbing-Brinkman. Her tempo, her passion for a perfectly produced text, her knowledge of the most recent programs for word processing, and her indefatigable good humor are beyond all praise. However antifoundationalist we may become in theory, we know that in practice reliable foundations are indispensable. In the more than twelve years that we now have been working together, Machteld Strabbing has been such a reliable foundation for me.

ONE

Six Theses on Narrativist Philosophy of History*

1. Historical narratives are interpretations of the past.
 - 1.1. The terms *historical narrative* and *interpretation* provide better clues for an understanding of historiography than the terms *description* and *explanation*.
 - 1.2. We interpret not when we have too few data but when we have too many (see 4.3). Description and explanation require the “right” amount of data.
 - 1.2.1. Scientific theories are underdetermined since an infinite number of theories may account for the known data; interpretations are underdetermined since only an infinite number of interpretations could account for all the known data.
 - 1.3. Interpretation is not translation. The past is not a text that has to be *translated* into narrative historiography; it has to be *interpreted*.
 - 1.4. Narrative interpretations are not necessarily of a sequential nature; historical narratives are only contingently stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end.
 - 1.4.1. Historical time is a relatively recent and highly artificial invention of Western civilization. It is a cultural, not a philosophical notion.

* These theses summarize the views I expounded in my *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*, The Hague, 1983.

Hence, founding narrativism on the concept of time is building on quicksand.

- 1.4.2. Narrativism can explain time and is not explained by it (see 2.1.3 and 4.7.5).
- 1.5. Twenty years ago philosophy of history was scientistic; one ought to avoid the opposite extreme of seeing historiography as a form of literature. Historism is the *juste milieu* between the two: Historism retains what is right in both the scientistic and the literary approaches to history and avoids what is hyperbolic in both.
 - 1.5.1. Historiography *develops* narrative interpretations of sociohistorical reality; literature *applies* them.
- 1.6. There is no precise line of demarcation between historiography and narrativist philosophy of history (see 4.7.5 and 4.7.7).
2. Narrativism accepts the past as it is. In the form of a tautology: it accepts what is unproblematic about the past. What is unproblematic is a historical fact. Both senses of the latter statement are true (see 3.4.1 and 3.4.2).
 - 2.1. It is necessary to distinguish between historical research (a question of facts) and historical writing (a question of interpretation). The distinction is similar, though by no means identical, to the distinction in philosophy of science between observation statement and theory.
 - 2.1.1. The results of historical research are expressed in statements; narrative interpretations are sets of statements.
 - 2.1.2. The interesting distinction is not that between the singular and the general statement but between the general statement and historical narrative. The singular statement may serve both masters.
 - 2.1.3. Temporal determinations are expressed *in* statements and not *by* statements and are therefore not of particular interest to narrativist philosophy of history. Narrativist philosophy of history deals with statements and not with their parts (like temporal indications).

- 2.2. There is an affinity between philosophy of historical research and the components (statements) of a historical narrative. Philosophy of historical writing and the historical narrative in its totality are similarly related.
 - 2.2.1. With a few exceptions (W. H. Walsh, H. V. White, L. O. Mink), current philosophy of history is interested exclusively in historical research.
 - 2.2.2. Its distrust of (narrativist) holism prevents current philosophy from understanding historical narrative.
- 2.3. The most crucial and most interesting intellectual challenges facing the historian are found on the level of historical writing (selection, interpretation, how to see the past). The historian is essentially more than Collingwood's detective looking for the murderer of John Doe.
- 2.4. Since it deals only with the components of historical narrative, philosophy of action can never further our insight into historical narrative.
 - 2.4.1. Philosophy of action can never speak the language of the unintended consequences of human action. As a philosophy of history, philosophy of action is only suited to prehistorist historiography. Being unable to transcend the limitations of methodological individualism, it is historiographically naive.
 - 2.4.2. Von Wright's and Ricoeur's attempts to solve this problem for philosophy of action are unsuccessful. Historical meaning is different from the agent's intention.
 - 2.4.3. The language of the unintended consequences is the language of interpretation (there ordinarily is a difference between the historian's perspective and that of the historical agent).
 - 2.4.4. The *logical connection argument* is a special case of narrativism (in that it provides a logical scheme in which knowledge of the past is organized).
- 3. Narrativism is the modern heir of historicism (not to be confused with Popper's historicism): both recognize that the historian's task is essentially interpretative (i.e., to find unity in diversity).

- 3.1. Interpretations strive for the unity that is characteristic of things (see 4.4).
- 3.1.2. Historists attempted to discover the essence, or, as they called it, the *historische Idee*, which they assumed was present in the historical phenomena themselves. Narrativism, on the contrary, recognized that a historical interpretation *projects* a structure onto the past and does not *discover* it as if this structure existed in the past itself.
- 3.1.3. Historism is an unexceptionable theory of history if it is translated from a theory about historical phenomena into a theory about our speaking about the past (that which was metaphysical must become linguistic).
- 3.1.4. Insofar as the notion of plot or intrigue is suggestive of a structure or story present in the past itself, this notion is an unwarranted concession to historicist, or narrativist, realism.
- 3.2. Historical narratives are not projections (onto the past) or reflections of the past, tied to it by translation rules which have their origin either in our daily experiences of the social world, in the social sciences, or in speculative philosophies of history.
- 3.2.1. Narrative interpretations are theses, not hypotheses.
- 3.3. Narrative interpretations *apply* to the past, but do not *correspond* or *refer* to it (as [parts of] statements do).
- 3.3.1. Much of current philosophy of historical narrative is bewitched by the picture of the statement.
- 3.3.2. Narrative language is autonomous with regard to the past itself. A philosophy of narrative makes sense if, and only if, this autonomy is recognized (see 4.5).
- 3.3.3. Since narrative interpretations only apply and do not refer (cf. the point of view from which a painter paints a landscape), there is no fixity in the relation between them and the past. The requirement that there should be such a relationship results from a category mistake (i.e., demanding for historical narrative what can only be given to the statement).

- 3.3.4. Narrative interpretations “pull you out of historical reality” and do not “send you back to it” (as the statement does).
- 3.4. In narrative language the relation between language and reality is systematically “destabilized” (see 5.1.2).
 - 3.4.1. Epistemology is of relevance to philosophy of historical research, but of no importance to philosophy of historical writing or philosophy of narrative interpretation.
 - 3.4.2. Epistemology, studying the relation between language and reality insofar as this relation is fixed and stable, disregards all the real problems of science and of historiography which only arise after that which bothers epistemology has been accepted as unproblematic. *Foundationalism* is interested in what is fundamentally uninteresting.
 - 3.4.3. The philosophical investigation of “what justifies historical descriptions” is an implicit denial and denigration of the historian’s intellectual achievements.
- 4. Narrative language is not object language.
 - 4.1. Narrative language *shows* the past in terms of what does not *refer* or *correspond* to parts or aspects of the past. Narrative interpretations in this regard resemble the models used by fashion designers for showing the qualities of their gowns and dresses. Language is used for showing what belongs to a world different from it.
 - 4.1.1. Narrativism is a constructivism not of what the past might have been like, but of narrative interpretations of the past.
 - 4.1.2. Narrative interpretations are *Gestalts*.
 - 4.2. Logically, narrative interpretations are of the nature of proposals (to see the past from a certain point of view).
 - 4.2.1. Proposals may be useful, fruitful, or not, but cannot be either true or false; the same can therefore be said of historical narratives.
 - 4.2.2. There is no intrinsic difference between speculative systems and history proper; they are *used* in different ways. Speculative systems are used as *master-narratives* to which other narratives should conform.

- 4.2.3. The writing of history shares with metaphysics the effort of defining the essence of (part of) reality, but differs from metaphysics because of its nominalism (see 4.7.1).
- 4.3. Narrative interpretations are not knowledge but *organizations* of knowledge. Our age, with its excess of information—and confronted with the problem of the organization of knowledge and information, rather than of how knowledge is gained—has every reason to be interested in the results of narrativism.
- 4.3.1. Cognitivism, with regard to narrative interpretations, is the source of all realist misconceptions of historical narrative.
- 4.4. Logically, narrative proposals are of the nature of things (not of concepts); like things they can be spoken about without ever being part of the language in which they are *mentioned*. Language is used here with the purpose of constructing a narrative interpretation which itself lies outside the domain of language, though the interpretation is “made out of” language (similarly, the meaning of the word *chair* cannot be reduced to the letters in the word).
- 4.4.1. Narrative interpretations cross the familiar border between the domain of things and the domain of language—as does metaphor.
- 4.5. A historical discussion about the crisis of the seventeenth century, for example, is not a debate about the actual past but about narrative interpretations of the past.
- 4.5.1. Our speaking about the past is covered by a thick crust not related to the past itself but to historical interpretation and the debate about rival historical interpretations. Narrative language has no transparency and is unlike the glass paperweight through which we gain an unobstructed view of the past itself.
- 4.6. The autonomy of narrative language with regard to the past itself does not in the least imply that narrative interpretations should be arbitrary (see 5.3, 5.6).
- 4.6.1. Facts about the past may be arguments in favor of or against narrative interpretations but can never determine these interpretations (facts only [dis]prove statements about the past) (see 1.2.1). Only interpretations can (dis)prove interpretations.

- 4.7. Narrative interpretations may have proper names (like the General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century, the Cold War, Mannerism, or the Industrial Revolution). Mostly, however, this is not the case.
- 4.7.1. Narrative logic is strictly nominalist.
- 4.7.2. Names like *Mannerism* refer to historical interpretations and not to past reality itself (“What Mannerism do you have in mind?” “Pevsner’s Mannerism.”).
- 4.7.3. This does not imply that these names are floating in a domain unrelated to historical reality itself (example: the name *Mannerism* refers to the statements of a narrative interpretation, and in these statements, reference is made to historical reality itself).
- 4.7.4. Narrative interpretations have no existential implications (for example: *the Industrial Revolution* is not a vast impersonal force in historical reality, unnoticed and undiscovered until 1884 when Arnold Toynbee wrote *The Industrial Revolution in England*, but an interpretative instrument for understanding the past).
- 4.7.5. Nevertheless, if a narrative interpretation goes unquestioned for a long time, is accepted by everybody, and becomes part of ordinary language (thereby losing its historiographical nature), it may turn into the notion of a (type of) thing. A *narrative thing* (see 4.4) has become a *thing in reality*. This is how our concepts of (types of) things originate. Typification procedures decide what is still merely interpretative and what is real; there is nothing fixed and absolute about the demarcation between what is interpretation and what belongs to the inventory of reality.
- 4.7.6. Concepts of (types of) things (like *dog* or *tree*) are logically more complicated than narrative interpretations, since they presuppose a typification procedure still absent in the case of the latter. Interpretation logically precedes our (notions of) types of things. Ontology is a systematization of interpretation.
- 4.7.7. Metaphor and narrative interpretation form the basis of our language.
- 4.7.8. Without a theory of types, narrativism is impossible. Without it, we inevitably look in the wrong direction. (Types of) things are then more fundamental than narrative interpretations.

- 4.7.9. To require fixed meanings for words like *the Cold War* or *Mannerism* would amount to requiring that historical debate should stop. Historical writing does not presuppose, but results in definitions.
- 4.7.10. Notions like *the Cold War*, being sets of statements, are logically distinct from theoretical concepts.
- 4.8. Causal explanation—for instance, along the lines of the *covering law model* (CLM)—has its function exclusively on the level of historical research (and on that of the components of historical narrative): we should not ask for the cause of the Cold War since what this term refers to is a narrative interpretation. It makes no sense to ask for the cause of a historical interpretation. Anyone who asks for the cause of the Cold War is really asking for a vigorous interpretation of events between 1944 and the early 1990s and not for a causal tie between two separate sets of events.
- 5. The statements of a historical narrative always have a *double* function: 1) to describe the past; and 2) to define or individuate a specific narrative interpretation of the past.
 - 5.1. Logically, both historical narratives and metaphor consist of two operations only: 1) description; and 2) the individuation of a (metaphorical) point of view. Historical narrative is a sustained metaphor.
 - 5.1.1. Metaphor shows what the metaphorical utterance is about in terms of something else (e.g., “John is a pig”); similarly, historical narrative shows the past in terms of what is not the past, (i.e., a narrative interpretation) (see 4.1).
 - 5.1.2. Thanks to its autonomy with regard to historical reality—in historical narrative the relation between language and reality is constantly destabilized—historical narrative, like metaphor, is the birthplace of new meaning. Accepted, literal meaning requires a fixed relation between language and reality.
 - 5.2. The discrepancy between the (literal) meaning of the individual statements of a historical narrative—if taken separately—and the (metaphorical) meaning of historical narrative—if taken in its totality—is the *scope* of historical narrative. This shows the difference between the chronicle (corresponding to the separate statement)

and historical narrative (corresponding to the totality of a narrative's statements). A set of statements arbitrarily jumbled together has no scope.

- 5.2.1. A historical narrative is a historical narrative only insofar as the (metaphorical) meaning of the historical narrative in its totality transcends the (literal) meaning of the sum of its individual statements. Being a historical narrative, therefore, is a matter of degree.
- 5.2.2. The historical narrative resembles a belvedere: after having climbed the staircase of its individual statements, one surveys an area exceeding by far the area on which the staircase was built.
- 5.2.3. The historian's capacity to develop (metaphorical) narrative scope is the most formidable asset in his intellectual arsenal.
- 5.3. The best historical narrative is the most metaphorical historical narrative, the historical narrative with the largest scope. It is also the most "risky" or the most "courageous" historical narrative. In contrast, the nonnarrativist has to prefer an unmeaning historical narrative without internal organization.
- 5.3.1. The narrative scope of a historical narrative cannot be established by considering only *that* historical narrative. Narrative scope only comes into being when one compares narrative interpretations with rival interpretations. If we have only *one* narrative interpretation of some historical topic, we have *no* interpretation.
- 5.3.2. Historical insight, therefore, is only born in the space *between* rival narrative interpretations and cannot be identified with any specific (set of) interpretations.
- 5.3.3. *Cognitive knowledge* is to be identified with the linguistic means used for expressing it (singular statements, general statements, theories, etc.); *historical insight* lies in the empty narrative space between the narrative interpretations (it is stereoscopic, so to speak).
- 5.3.4. Historical insight is constituted in and by historiographical controversy and not by the individual phases of historiographical controversy, hence not by individual narrative interpretations in isolation from others.

- 5.3.5. Historiographical debate, ultimately, does not aim for agreement but for the proliferation of interpretative theses. The purpose of historiography is *not* the transformation of narrative things into real things (or their type concepts) (see 4.7.5). On the contrary, it attempts to bring about the dissolution of what seems known and unproblematic. Its goal is not the reduction of the unknown to the known, but the estrangement of what seems so familiar.
- 5.3.6. This emphasis on disagreement and historiographical controversy requires us to reject the notion of a Cartesian or Kantian, interchangeable, transcendental knowing subject. The Aristotelian view is to be preferred. For Aristotle, experience and knowledge *are* the interaction between us and the world and not an abstraction from it determined by a transcendentalist, formal scheme. Similarly, historic interpretation arises from the interaction of interpretations and should not be attributed to either a concrete individual nor to a transhistorical, transcendental subject.
- 5.4. Narrative scope is logically independent of the realm of values; therefore, historical narrative need not be value-free in order to have a large scope—that is, in order to be objective (for example, the notion of the totalitarian state proposed by K. Popper, J. L. Talmon, H. Arendt, and others was not value-free but had a very large scope).
- 5.4.1. The historian is the professional “outsider”: the gap between himself and historical reality, which he is always attempting to bridge, is identical to the gap between the individual and society, which ethics and political philosophy attempt to bridge. The ethical dimension must therefore be ubiquitous in historiography. Modern historiography is based on a political decision.
- 5.4.2. Metaphor and narrative are the *trait d’union* between the *is* and the *ought*—the *is* of the constative statements of a historical interpretation may suggest what *ought* to be done.
- 5.5. Leibniz’s predicate in notion principle is the crucial theorem of the logic of historical interpretation. All statements about a historical narrative are *analytically* either true or false.
- 5.5.1. The fashionable view that the variables of quantification will take the place of the subject term in statements (Russell, Quine) is incorrect for narrative statements (i.e., statements about historical

narratives). The subject term in narrative statements is unvoiceable, precisely because it merely “collects” the statements contained by a historical narrative.

- 5.5.2. Narrative interpretations have explanatory force since the description of historical states of affairs can be analytically derived from them.
- 5.6. There is no room for historical skepticism. We can see the rationality of why historians in a certain phase of historical debate preferred one view of the past to another. Skepticism only results if one is not content with the rationality of historical debate and absolute *foundations* are required. But, in practice, this requirement can never be more than an exhortation to historians to do their job carefully and conscientiously.
- 6. The roots of historicity go deeper than is suggested by either modern historiography or current philosophy (of history).
 - 6.1. The notion of the self is a historical, narrative interpretation—the narrative interpretation that is presupposed by *all* other historical interpretations. This is the kernel of truth in Anglo-Saxon hermeneutics.
 - 6.1.1. Consequently, the fact that narrative interpretations already play a role on the level of the life of the human individual can never be an argument in favor of a certain variant of narrative realism (i.e., the view that historical knowing should be modelled on our experiences of daily reality). It is the reverse: interpretative narrativism has already invaded our daily reality.
 - 6.1.2. The concepts of (types of) individual things are logically dependent upon narrative interpretations (identity). Thus: identity precedes individuality, not the reverse, as positivism suggests (see 4.7.5).

TWO

The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History

My thesis in this essay will be that contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history is confronted with a dilemma and that the future of philosophy of history depends on the choice that is ultimately reached. I have deliberately avoided the word *crisis* and used the word *dilemma*, as the two alternative standpoints in this dilemma do not share a common past in the way that is suggested by the word *crisis*. Rather, two different forms of philosophy of history, each with an intellectual ancestry of its own, are opposed to each other, while having remarkably little in common. The choice will therefore be between two different tracks, rather than between the two bifurcations of one and the same track we have all been following up to now.

The two sides to the dilemma can be described in a number of different ways. One could speak simply of new philosophy of history versus traditional philosophy of history, of interpretative versus descriptivist philosophy of history, of synthetic versus analytic philosophy of history, of linguistic versus critical philosophy of history, or, as does Hans Kellner,¹ of postmodernist versus modernist philosophy of history. All these labels have their advantages and disadvantages and they all capture part of the truth. Nevertheless, for reasons that will become clear in the course of my argument, I prefer the terms *narrativist philosophy of history* versus *epistemological philosophy of history*.

Epistemological philosophy of history has always been concerned with the criteria for the truth and validity of historical descriptions and explanations; it has attempted to answer the epistemological question as to the conditions under which we are justified in believing the historian's state-

1. H. Kellner, "Allegories of Narrative Will: Post-Structuralism and Recent Philosophy of Historical Narrativity," in Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation*, Madison, 1989.

ments about the past (either singular or general) to be true. Narrativist philosophy of history, on the other hand, concentrates upon the nature of the linguistic instruments historians develop for furthering our understanding of the past. Epistemological philosophy of history is concerned with the *relation* between historical statements and what they are about; narrativist philosophy of history tends to remain in the domain of historical language. This state of affairs should not be interpreted as though epistemological philosophy of history is “realist” and narrative philosophy of history “idealist”; one of the main objectives of narrativist philosophy of history is, in fact, to determine the distinction between the historian’s language and what it is about, which is presupposed by the antithesis of realism versus idealism. This may explain just how far apart the two traditions actually are and why they are not mutually reducible. Lastly, I hasten to add that much, if not most, historiography does not have the nature of telling a story; all associations with storytelling, to which the term *narrativism* might give rise, should consequently be avoided. *Narrativism* should rather be associated with (historical) interpretation.

In the first section of this introduction, I shall describe the epistemological tradition; in section 2, the narrativist tradition; and in the last section I hope to answer the question as to which topics will afford fruitful study in the future if the narrativist approach is found preferable to its older rival.

1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Epistemological philosophy of history has four sources. It arose from: 1) the rejection of German historicism; 2) the rejection of speculative philosophies of history; 3) the attempt to offer a satisfactory reconstruction of historical explanation, based on the premises of the *covering-law model* (CLM); and 4) different forms of Collingwoodian hermeneutics. The epistemological nature of these four pillars of traditional Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history will be obvious to everybody. Historism and speculative systems were rejected because it was thought that they did not satisfy the epistemological criteria for historical knowledge. The CLM and Collingwoodian hermeneutics, on the other hand, attempted to discover the nature of these epistemological criteria. In the remainder of this section, I shall discuss each of these four components of the epistemological tradition and complete the picture with an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses.

Except for F. H. Bradley’s *The Presuppositions of Critical History* (1874),² it might be argued that Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history as we know it

2. See W. H. Walsh, “Bradley and Critical History,” in A. Manser and G. Stock, eds., *The Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*, Oxford, 1984.

today begins with M. Mandelbaum's *The Problem of Historical Knowledge* (1938). Here, Mandelbaum even steals a march on Collingwood, although the latter had, of course, been doing a great deal of work in the field since the 1920s. The significance of Mandelbaum's first work has often been overlooked. It seems likely that the conclusions Mandelbaum reached there left indelible marks on the epistemological tradition. At the time when Mandelbaum wrote his book, German historicism had drifted into the so-called "crisis of historicism."³ With his famous but usually misunderstood dictum that it is the historian's task "not to pass judgment on the past, nor to teach lessons for future use, but only to show how the past has actually been," Ranke had urged historians to consider the past only from the perspective of the past itself. An ethical relativism confusing the (time-bound) popularity of ethical norms with their (time-independent) applicability was mistakenly inferred from Ranke's injunction. Thus, when Mandelbaum found German historicism in its state of self-inflicted destruction, the picture he drew of it, not surprisingly, did little to recommend historicism to Anglo-Saxon philosophers. Historicism became synonymous with a poor and obscure response to the challenges of ethical relativism.

The net result has been that Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history had from the very beginning isolated itself from one-and-a-half centuries of profound and penetrating thinking about the writing of history. This is even more regrettable because historicism was not only the fountainhead of a sizable part of all historiography produced since the beginning of the last century but also because it possessed an awareness of the practice of history so conspicuously lacking in Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history. Owing to the intellectual disorientation in Germany after the Hitler period, German philosophers and historians—with a few exceptions, such as J. Rüsen, T. Nipperdey, or H. Lübke⁴—felt little inclination to formulate a modern and self-assured defense of historicism. Georg Iggers's book—so very well-informed and erudite—codified the *communis opinio* that historicism had been a regrettable phase in philosophy of history which now fortunately belonged to the same past it had always studied in such an erroneous and dangerous way.⁵

It is characteristic of their almost contemptuous dismissal of German

3. Mandelbaum described the attempts made by Simmel, Rickert, Scheler, and Troeltsch to counter relativism as a "set of failures": M. Mandelbaum, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge*, New York, 1938, 174. For a comprehensive German statement of the problem, see K. Heussi, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, Tübingen, 1932.

4. J. Rüsen, *Für eine erneuerte Historik Zur Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt, 1976; T. Nipperdey, "Historismus und Historismuskritik heute," in Nipperdey, *Die Funktion der Geschichte in unserer Zeit*, Stuttgart, 1975, 82–95; H. Lübke, *Geschichtsbegriff und Geschichtsinteresse*, Basel/Stuttgart, 1977.

5. G. G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History* [1968], Middletown, 1984.

historism that Anglo-Saxon philosophers of history—otherwise so sensitive to fine terminological distinctions—never even bothered to make a clear distinction between historism and what Popper called *historicism*.⁶ There is a strange story about Popper's rejection of historicism. He obviously had in mind what Walsh was to define a few years later as *speculative philosophies of history*.⁷ What Popper criticized was mainly the pretension on the part of some speculative philosophies to predict the future by extrapolating from the past to the future in one way or another. Since historians are usually interested in the past and not in the future, Popper's criticism did not succeed in presenting speculative philosophies as an illegitimate form of what historians legitimately try to do. Not only did the historicists' claim that they could interpret the past in a superior way survive Popper's onslaught relatively unscathed, but it has even been shown by B. T. Wilkins in his detailed analysis of the last chapter of Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* that Popper actually believed speculative systems to function in historiography as "searchlight theories" and that they are therefore indispensable for all historical interpretation.⁸ This idea was to be elaborated on with vigor and perspicacity by Fain and Munz.

Another strategy in the attack on speculative systems has been to accuse them of being metaphysical. Speculative systems, it was argued, cannot be tested in the way "ordinary" historical interpretations of the past can be tested. Marx's claim that all history is the history of the class struggle is as unverifiable as its equally metaphysical counterpart that all history is the history of class cooperation. However, one can agree with Walsh that both speculative systems and "ordinary" historiography attempt to define "the essence" of part of the past and therefore cannot be distinguished one from the other by means of criteria which distinguish metaphysical claims to knowledge from verifiable ones.⁹ Once again, though philosophers tried to reject speculative systems, they could not find conclusive arguments against them.

It is therefore not surprising that the failure to discredit speculative systems effectively formed one of the first cracks in epistemological philosophy of history. As early as 1972—when the CLM still reigned supreme in Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history—Fain made an ingenious attack on the Humean notion of causality underlying most of the arguments in favor of the CLM.¹⁰ He pointed out that, contrary to Hume's theory of causality, in historiography the relation between what is called a *cause* and what is

6. See the introduction to K. R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London, 1957.

7. W. H. Walsh, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History* [1951], London, 1967, 16.

8. B. T. Wilkins, *Has History Any Meaning?* Hassocks, 1978.

9. See W. H. Walsh, *Metaphysics*, London, 1963, 172ff.

10. H. Fain, *Between Philosophy and History*, Princeton, 1970.

called its *consequence* is not external but internal. Apart from purely formal conditions, history also has its material requirements regarding what is to be counted as a cause. Something that fits in the CLM is often not considered by historians to be an acceptable cause. According to Fain, speculative systems define these material requirements. They identify in the historical past a number of layers of historical events and phenomena having the same ontological nature; and having the same ontological nature makes events causally relatable. It did not become clear from Fain's book, however, whether the guidance provided by speculative systems on our journey through the past should be seen as an addition to the Humean causal model or as a replacement for it. In a very readable book, Munz has developed ideas very similar to those of Fain, although he strove quite explicitly for a reconciliation between speculative philosophy and the CLM.¹¹ The final outcome of the debate has been that we look at speculative systems in the way we look at extramarital sex: it is practiced by many, is supposed to be both natural and exciting, but is nevertheless not exactly according to the proper rules.

This, however, has not been the central issue. The debate in epistemological philosophy of history has always been dominated by the controversy between the adherents of the CLM and the defenders of the legacy left by Collingwood. In the course of my exposition, it will become clear that, contrary to appearances, the two parties have more in common than they have separating them. It is ironic that the origins of the debate, as well as its justification, are found outside philosophy of history proper. This will become clear if we imagine a list of academic disciplines, arranged according to the ease with which they fit the positivist scientific model (I use the term *positivist* here in a general, untechnical sense). At the top of the list we shall find (theoretical) physics, then chemistry, biology, geology, the social sciences (starting with economics), and—finally at the end of the list—we come to history. The general background to the debate between the CLM advocates and the Collingwoodians has always been the question as to whether—from a methodological point of view—there is a point, as one moves down the list, at which things really become quite different. In other words, it was not historiography, per se, but the thesis of the unity of science that was the real issue in the debate. Not surprisingly, philosophers of a positivist bent who accepted this thesis found in history a marvelous challenge to their ingenuity. It was believed that if the scientific nature of historiography could even be demonstrated (by declaring one CLM-variant or another valid for historiography), the positivist's claim as to the unity of all scientific and rational inquiry would have been substantiated. Consequently, a great number of philosophers, most

11. P. Munz, *The Shapes of Time*, Middletown, 1977.

of them interested in history not so much for its own sake but because of its quality as a peculiar fringe area, pounced upon the problem of historical explanation in the attempt to adapt it to the requirements of the CLM.

Strangely enough, even from the point of view of positivist philosophy of science, the battleground for the controversy had been chosen in such a way that the philosophical significance of the debate could never be more than marginal. Philosophers of science, whether they were neopositivists, adherents of Popper, of Kuhn, or of whatever other philosophical denomination one might think of, were never interested in explanation as such but in theory and concept formation. Nevertheless, during the CLM debate it was rarely, if ever, asked whether being in conformity with the CLM would in itself be sufficient to elevate history to the status of a science; nor was it asked whether something analogous to theory and concept formation might not also be found in historiography. Raising the latter question would have advanced the birth of the narrativist tradition in philosophy of history by some twenty years. No doubt, the fact that the controversy between the CLM proponents and the Collingwoodians naturally centered on the not very illuminating problem of the existence of covering laws prevented a more timely "takeoff" of the narrativist approach.

Nevertheless, the CLM debate has been well worthwhile, if only because its apparent lack of resolution made philosophers of history aware of a number of unsuspected characteristics of historiography. There were even positive results. At the time of the debate—and this was surely no coincidence—both historians and philosophers of history¹² advocated a rapprochement between history and the social sciences. Suggestions like those of Joynt and Rescher¹³ that history should be seen as a kind of applied science and the historian as a "consumer" rather than as a "producer" of socioscientific laws placed the CLM in an optimal position to mediate between history and the social sciences. Conrad and Meyer's famous article in 1957 on the relation between economic theory and economic history¹⁴—generally regarded as having triggered the New Economic History—is a striking illustration of the fruitfulness of the CLM for

12. Most influential has been D. S. Landes and C. Tilly, *History as Social Science*, London, 1973; the relation between history and the social sciences has become the most hotly debated topic in German philosophy of history.

13. C. B. Joynt and N. Rescher, "The Problem of Uniqueness in History," *History and Theory* 1 (1960): 158; and in G. H. Nadel, ed., *Studies in the Philosophy of History*, New York, 1965, 7. The *locus classicus* of the CLM is, of course, C. G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *Journal of Philosophy* 39 (1942). For an exposition of the statistical variant of the CLM, see C. G. Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*, New York, 1968, 38off.

14. A. H. Conrad and J. R. Meyer, "Economic Theory, Statistical Inference, and Economic History," in A. J. Conrad and J. R. Meyer, eds., *The Economics of Slavery*, Chicago, 1964, 3-30.

actual historical practice. Some form of CLM is clearly presupposed by both counterfactual analysis and model building in economic history.¹⁵

Within the epistemological tradition, the CLM has been attacked from both the "inside" and the "outside." CLM defenders themselves were quick to recognize that there was little in actual historical practice that was in accordance with the requirements of the CLM. Moreover, it proved depressingly difficult to produce a historical law which was both valid and interesting. To meet this problem, a number of statistical-inductive variants of the original nomothetic-deductive CLM were developed. But, even then, difficulties remained. It could be argued that M. Scriven's and M. White's proposal to reduce the role of covering laws to a mere justification of the historian's choice of a specific event as a cause, instead of that of a general premise in a deductive argument, has been the most successful strategy in the history of the CLM and its subsequent metamorphoses in refuting the charge of empty schematism and inapplicability.¹⁶

But most of the objections to the CLM came from the disciples Collingwood won some twenty years after his premature death. Henceforth, when referring to this tradition, I shall use the term *analytical hermeneutics*, which has been suggested by F. Olafson. A short terminological digression is in order here. It is useful to distinguish between a German (or continental) hermeneutical tradition, from Schleiermacher to Gadamer or Derrida—and beyond—and Anglo-Saxon hermeneutics, from Collingwood on.¹⁷ The former has as its paradigm the interpretation of texts (preferably biblical, juridical, or literary), and the latter the explanation of intentional human action. It must be emphasized that the aims of these two forms of hermeneutics are quite different: German hermeneutics tends to see the past (that is, the text) as something given and urges us to take a step back, as it were, in order to find out about its significance; Anglo-Saxon hermeneutics moves in exactly the opposite direction, by urging us to try to discover *new* historical data (that is, the intentions behind human action). German hermeneutics wants us to choose a vantage point outside or above the past itself; Anglo-Saxon hermeneutics requires us to penetrate ever deeper into the past. Characteristically, German hermeneutics—especially Gadamer¹⁸—is largely indifferent to the so-called *mens auctoris*,

15. P. D. McClelland, *Causal Explanation and Model Building in History, Economics, and the New Economic History*, Ithaca, 1975; M. G. Murphey, *Our Knowledge of the Historical Past*, Indianapolis, 1973.

16. M. Scriven, "Truisms as the Grounds for Historical Explanations," in P. Gardiner, ed., *Theories of History*, New York, 1959; M. White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge*, New York, 1965, chap. 3.

17. I elaborated on this distinction in my *Denken over geschiedenis: Een overzicht van moderne geschiedfilosofische denkbeelden*, Groningen, 1984.

18. H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming, New York, 1986.

whereas “analytical hermeneutics” has no other objective than to reconstruct it. German hermeneutics shares with the narrativist tradition—to be dealt with in the next section—a synthetic approach to the past; Anglo-Saxon hermeneutics is openly analytical—a fact which may justify Olafson’s choice of terminology. German or continental hermeneutics has deeply influenced today’s literary criticism and, via literary criticism, has recently found its way into the narrativist tradition within Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history.

The epistemological nature of analytical hermeneutics is particularly pronounced. As has been demonstrated by Van der Dussen in his dissertation and by Meiland in an admirable little book,¹⁹ Collingwood’s reenactment theory was originally an answer to the epistemological question as to how historical knowledge is possible (in a nutshell, the answer can be summed up as follows: historical knowledge is possible because by reenacting the thoughts of the historical agent, these thoughts are brought into the present and can then be investigated here and now). The same is still true of Dray’s *action rationale explanation*, since this model is supposed to define which epistemological criteria have to be fulfilled before we are allowed to say, “I now have the explanation as to why *x* did *a*.”

Although analytical hermeneutics went through a difficult period in the 1950s, a series of monographs on Collingwood, written in the 1960s by Donagan, Mink, and Rubinoff,²⁰ rapidly tipped the balance between the CLM and analytical hermeneutics in favor of the latter. Analytical hermeneutics underwent a number of transformations in the course of time. Collingwood’s still rather crude reenactment theory gave way to Dray’s rationale explanation, which was to be refined, in its turn, by the intentional explanation and the so-called “logical connection argument” (LCA), which will be described later on. The practical inference to be reconstructed by the historian was analyzed with an ever-increasing sophistication. However, most philosophers of history nowadays agree that further refinement of the scheme of practical inference will inexorably be subject to the law of diminishing returns. That may explain why some philosophers of history have recently become attracted to Collingwood’s as-yet-undeveloped *logic of question and answer*²¹—a pronounced contextualist theory of history quite irreconcilable with the propositionalism of his earlier reenactment theory.²²

19. J. W. Meiland, *Scepticism and Historical Knowledge*, New York, 1965, chap. 3; W. J. van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*, The Hague, 1981, 157ff.

20. A. Donagan, *The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*, Oxford, 1962; L. O. Mink, *Mind, History and Dialectic: The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*, Bloomington, 1969; L. Rubinoff, *Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind*, Toronto, 1970.

21. R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* [1939], Oxford, 1970, chap. 5.

22. See my “De Angelsaksische hermeneutiek en de geschiedbeoefening,” in T. de Boer, ed., *De filosofie van de mens—en cultuurwetenschappen*, Meppel, 1989.

The debate between the advocates of the CLM and the analytical hermeneuticists was hampered by the unexpected difficulty in identifying what it was that was at stake in the controversy. A notable exception was P. Skagestad, who in a brilliant book²³ succeeded in translating the controversy (with Popper and Collingwood as the main antagonists) into an ontological issue. If Popper's third world (containing the thoughts of historical agents) ought to be stratified into an object-level and a metalevel, the CLM is to be preferred; if not, analytical hermeneutics is preferable. Relying upon Russell's theory of descriptions, Skagestad opted for the latter alternative.²⁴ Usually, however, the issue was not stated so clearly. When hermeneuticists argued that they did not apply laws (since their explanation was based exclusively on the ascertainment of a *fact*, that is, what "I" would have done under certain historical circumstances), and CLM proponents answered that such an explanation always presupposed a covering law (namely that *all* rational persons would do what I believe I would do myself under such circumstances), the debate tended to degenerate into a rather fruitless controversy about the priority of the *context of justification* versus *the context of discovery*—to put it in Reichenbach's terms.²⁵

Dray's influential first book²⁶ is a striking illustration of how difficult it apparently was to state with clarity the nature of the disagreement between the CLM and analytical hermeneutics. It has been noted by several commentators that Dray's criticism of the CLM and his defense of his *action rationale explanation* formed entirely different strands in his argument. It was as if Dray first had to transform himself into a reluctant advocate of the CLM before he was able to criticize the model so effectively. And in a later article of Dray's, the same division is even more pronounced.²⁷ The net result of this course of events was, of course, that the CLM found itself in a relatively secure position. Its supporters could decide where the battle with their opponents was to be fought, and as long as the model did not succumb to disagreements among its own adherents, all criticism would, in practice, amount to a refinement and not a rejection of the model.

In a later phase of the debate, the logical connection argument (LCA) provided analytical hermeneutics with a better argument to prove its independence from the CLM. Following suggestions made by Wittgenstein in

23. P. Skagestad, *Making Sense of History: The Philosophies of Popper and Collingwood*, Oslo, 1975.

24. I expressed my reservations about Skagestad's argument in my "Een nieuwe synthese?" *Theoretische geschiedenis* 6 (1979): 58–91.

25. R. H. Weingartner, "The Quarrel about Historical Explanation," in R. H. Nash, ed., *Ideas of History*, vol. 2. New York, 1969.

26. W. H. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History*, Oxford, 1957.

27. W. H. Dray, "The Historical Explanation of Actions Reconsidered," in P. Gardiner, ed., *The Philosophy of History*, Oxford, 1974.

his *Philosophical Investigations* (such as his “the human body is the best picture of the human soul”²⁸), the LCA replaced the causal relation between motives and actions with a logical one. With one simple stroke the CLM, with its causal—and not logical—covering laws, had been expelled from the domain of the explanation of human actions. In order to prove the LCA, Donagan wrote that if an agent has the intention *I* and knows that action *a* may realize *I*, and action *a* is still not carried out, we shall have to conclude that the agent never seriously intended *I*. In other words, it is part of the meaning of having an intention that the relevant action will be carried out. As may be clear from this admittedly imperfect rendering of Donagan’s version of the LCA, the LCA in its initial formulation seemed to achieve the union between intention and action almost by a feat of “magic.”²⁹ Later defenders of the LCA tried to remedy this. G. H. Von Wright thus argued that the antecedens and the consequence in a practical inference of the form (1) *A* intends to bring about *p*; 2) *A* considers that he cannot bring about *p* unless he does *a*; 3) therefore *A* resolves to do *a*)³⁰ are analytical, since it is impossible to verify the consequence without verifying the antecedens, and vice versa. The deficiencies in Von Wright’s argument were convincingly exposed in Rex Martin’s *Historical Explanation*.³¹ Martin’s book, hitherto unsurpassed in the development of the possibilities inherent in analytical hermeneutics, has up to now not received the attention it deserves.³² Martin’s thesis was that the LCA is not a logical rule but a regulative rule, like the rule that every event has its cause. The function of such rules is to make a certain kind of inquiry epistemologically possible.

But one may wonder whether all this makes much of a difference. Whether human actions are explained by means of covering laws, the LCA, a regulative rule, or the general rule that all rational people are disposed to act rationally, a *general* rule is required in all cases. We therefore have no reason to be very greatly impressed by the deviation from the CLM as proposed by the LCA and others. It is nice, of course, that the LCA reconciled historical explanation with the Wittgensteinian and Rylean condemnation of causal “ghosts in the machine,” but that hardly had anything to do with the original disagreement between proponents of the CLM and of analytical hermeneutics.

28. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [1953], Oxford, 1974, 178e.

29. T. Kuipers, “The Logic of Intentional Explanation,” in J. Hintikka and F. Vandamme, eds., *The Logic of Discourse and the Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Dordrecht, 1986.

30. G. H. Von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, London, 1971, 96.

31. R. Martin, *Historical Explanation: Re-enactment and Practical Inference*, Ithaca, 1977, 174–175.

32. A. Ryan’s review in *History and Theory* 19 (1980): 93–100, failed to do justice to the book.

Besides, these later phases of analytical hermeneutics could even be seen as open or covert flirtations with the CLM. The original gap between Collingwood and Hempel is much wider than the later one between Von Wright or Martin and Scriven or, for example, between Murphey and other more recent defenders of the CLM. The present state of affairs in the debate should be seen as a movement toward a convergence or synthesis of the CLM and analytical hermeneutics rather than as the victory of the latter over the former. For example, within Von Wright's version of the LCA, the dividing wall between the two has become as thin as the dubious irreducibility of intentional descriptions of human actions to causalistic or physicalist descriptions of them. When Von Wright discusses the event of someone ringing a doorbell, this supposedly "irreducible" intentionalist component in an intentional description of that event is so forced and debatable that one may come to feel that even this thin dividing wall has collapsed already.

Martin's book forms an even more telling example of the convergence of the CLM and analytical hermeneutics. He divides the antecedens of the practical inference into a number of separate premises, roughly: 1) the agent finds himself in situation *S*, in which he wants to bring about some change; 2) certain alternatives to that end present themselves; 3) the realization of intention *I* seems to the agent to be the best option; 4) the agent believes that doing *a* will realize *I*; and 5) the agent has no conflicting intentions and is physically capable of performing *a*.³³ First, it should be noted that, in contrast to previous definitions of the practical inference, Martin is able to explain, thanks to premises 1, 2, and 3, why *S* gives rise to intention *I* in the mind of the agent. He thus avoids that vicious circle between intention and action which reduced the resorting to intentions in all the previous definitions to a role reminiscent of Wittgenstein's wheel in the machine that is driven without driving anything itself. Second, this elaboration of the scheme of the practical inference permits Martin to claim a new role and status for the CLM; for it will be the task of covering laws to connect the premises of the antecedens. Take, for example, Caesar after his conquest of Gaul. We can conceive of a general law to the effect that generals in similar situations—that is, when they are confronted by incursions on the part of a neighboring country—consider alternative ways of changing this unsatisfactory situation (thus linking premises 1 and 2), another stating that generals will usually decide that such incursions must be stopped (the link between 2 and 3), and still another one claiming that generals usually conclude that carrying out an invasion of the neighboring country will be the best solution (the link

33. Martin, *Explanation*, 78–79.

between 3 and 4) and so on. The CLM has thus been quietly absorbed into analytical hermeneutics.

We can establish that the debate between the CLM advocates and the analytical hermeneuticists has always been moving toward synthesis more than toward perpetuation of the disagreement. From the vantage point of the present, it is better to speak of “peaceful coexistence” between the two approaches than of an open war between them. Therefore, in the current phase of the debate in philosophy of history, it will be the similarities rather than the differences between the CLM and analytical hermeneutics that will strike us. The following five points sum up these similarities. When taken together, they define the most general presuppositions of epistemological philosophy of history.

First, both the CLM and analytical hermeneutics were relatively insensitive to the problems of actual historiographical practice. Beyond the New Economic History, historians did not have much reason to be interested in covering laws (or their application), and the explanation of the actions of individual historical agents studied in analytical hermeneutics is only a negligible part—and certainly not the most interesting part—of the historian’s task. In fact, the adherents of both the CLM and of analytical hermeneutics looked at historiography from a viewpoint outside historiography itself. The theory of the CLM reads like a lecture on applied logic or science, and analytical hermeneutics like a chapter in a book on the philosophy of action.

Second, both are primarily, if not exclusively, concerned with historical explanation. The historian’s universe, as seen through the eyes of both, looks very much like a piece of white paper speckled with an immense number of little dots, while it is the historian’s explanatory task to connect these dots with one another as well as he or she can. But, that the historian’s task is essentially interpretative—that is, to discover a *pattern* in the dots—had now been lost sight of. Precisely because of its epistemological concern with tying the historian’s language as closely as possible to the past itself, philosophy of history was never able to spread its wings and to become a philosophy of historical interpretation.

Consequently, both the CLM and analytical hermeneutics focused their attention on the details and not on the totality of historical studies. The historian has to establish and explain individual facts and was therefore conceived of essentially as a kind of detective, as Collingwood said.³⁴ Perhaps Collingwood’s experience as an archaeologist (he was certainly not a historian in the proper sense of the word) goes a long way in explaining his preoccupation with the problem of why people did, made, or thought

34. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* [1946], Oxford, 1970, 266ff.

certain things in the past; and it is undoubtedly true that his reenactment theory is well suited to the problem of how to study the artifacts from a remote past which has left no written tradition.

However, anybody even superficially acquainted with historiography will recognize that the explanation and description of individual historical facts form only a very minor part of what historians do. We admire great historians like Ranke, Tocqueville, Burckhardt, Huizinga, Meinecke, or Braudel, not for the accuracy of their descriptions and explanations of historical states of affairs, but for the panoramic interpretations they have offered of large parts of the past. Whichever way one tries to overcome the limitations of the CLM and of analytical hermeneutics, the scope of epistemological philosophy of history will invariably prove too narrow to account for such narrative interpretations of the past.

Third, in both its manifestations, the epistemological tradition demonstrates a lack of a sense of history that is quite astonishing for a philosophy of history. It seems to accept either tacitly or openly Hume's famous statement "that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains the same in its principles and operations."³⁵ This insensitivity to historical change manifests itself in the CLM in the generality of the covering laws it uses, whereas analytical hermeneutics by necessity presupposes a similarity between the historian's thought and the thought and action of the historical agent studied by the historian.

Fourth, in neither of its guises—either the covering law model or Collingwoodian hermeneutics—has epistemological philosophy of history ever succeeded in its hope of bridging the gap between the historian's language and historical reality. The CLM failed in this respect because, for a variety of reasons, *explanans* and *explanandum* never matched in a satisfactory way. It is true that Danto has done much to narrow the gap between the two by pointing out that we always explain events under a certain description of them and that one of the historian's most fascinating tasks is therefore to describe the past in such a way that we can feed those descriptions into the machinery of the covering laws we have at our disposal. But even Danto had to admit that whatever success the historian may have on this score, an appreciable distance will always remain between the past in all its complexity and explanatory language.³⁶

A similar criticism can be leveled at analytical hermeneutics, but this kind of criticism is considerably more interesting. Analytical hermeneutics has been accused of not being able to account for those aspects of the past

35. D. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Oxford, 1972, 83.

36. A. C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, Cambridge, 1968, 220ff.

that cannot be reduced to the (conscious or unconscious) intentions of individual human agents. Take, for example, the stock market crash of 1929. Since it was nobody's intention to become poorer, the crash cannot be explained in terms of the intentions of the speculators involved. Most adherents of analytical hermeneutics have accepted this serious limitation to their theory with a certain equanimity.³⁷ Von Wright is therefore an exception when he tries to refute the criticism that analytical hermeneutics is powerless when it comes to the unintended consequences of intentional human action. He takes as his example the origin of the First World War. According to Von Wright, each step taken by the Serbian, Austrian, German, or Russian government was the reaction to a previous step and can be explained by means of intentional explanation, by taking into account what diplomatic situation arose after each previous step. In this way there is nothing left that might give substance to the thesis of the unintended consequences of intentional action.³⁸ Von Wright's argument can be countered as follows. Number all the successive practical deliberations of the several governments involved up to the outbreak of war: $P_1 \dots P_n$. What, then, was the cause of the outbreak of war? Historians will rarely select P_n as the most likely candidate; they will prefer to say that each step in the series $P_1 \dots P_n$ contributed to the outbreak of war and was, therefore, part of the cause. Consequently, P_f , for example, was part of the cause, even though this practical deliberation did not intend to bring about the war. The language of the unintended consequences of intentional human action thus appears to be an essential part of the historian's language.

It is necessary to emphasize the following. Von Wright was correct insofar as his argument showed that only *people* and not *superhuman forces* make history, but he was wrong to infer from this that the historian's explanatory potential is exhausted with the appeal to intentional human action. The *language* of history permits the historian to see the past from a perspective different from that of the historical agents themselves, and it is purely and solely this change in perspective that gives rise to the thesis of the unintended consequences of intentional human action. This thesis is therefore not an ontological claim (the past contains both intentional actions *and* their unintended consequences) but a thesis concerning the autonomy of the historian's language with regard to the intentional actions of historical agents. As soon as it is conceded that the historian is not committed to the agent's point of view, the language of the unintended consequences can and will be used.³⁹ In other words, analytical hermeneutics was bewitched by the epistemological dream of a complete parallelism be-

37. Dray, *Laws*, 119; Martin, *Explanation*, 15.

38. Von Wright, *Explanation*, 139ff.

39. See chapter 3.

tween the historian's language (intentional explanations) and what was seen as the actual past (the practical deliberations of historical agents), and this dream seemed so real that it made philosophers of history completely blind to the realities of the writing of history. However, history is often shown or interpreted in terms of what has no demonstrable counterpart in the actual past itself. Thus neither the CLM nor analytical hermeneutics succeeded in achieving the epistemological goal of tying language to the world, of words to things. The CLM failed because historical *reality* proved to be too complex, and analytical hermeneutics failed because of its inability to account for the complexities of the historian's *language*. Obviously, the failure of analytical hermeneutics is more serious than that of the CLM. The latter can at least be transformed into a program for future historical research, whereas the failure of analytical hermeneutics is a failure to explain what historians have been doing already for several centuries.

Fifth, there is the epistemological nature itself of both the CLM and analytical hermeneutics. Here we discover an assumption which is so ubiquitously present, which seems so obvious and so innocuous, that it has hardly ever been paid any attention. According to this assumption, we can and should in all cases distinguish clearly among the following three levels: 1) that of the past itself; 2) that of the historical language we use for speaking about the past; and 3) that of philosophical reflection on how historians arrived at their conclusions and how these conclusions can be formally justified. Historical language is, to borrow Rorty's metaphor, the mirror of the past, and it is the essentially epistemological task of the philosopher of history to analyze how this mirror succeeds in showing us the past.

It is true that this scheme has always shown some cracks. For example, the troublesome problem of speculative philosophies seemed to blur the distinction between levels 2) and 3). In addition, historians were sometimes concerned about terms like *continuity*, *discontinuity*, *order*, or *chaos*. Obviously, the terms themselves belong to level 2); however, one may wonder whether they are only conceptual instruments for organizing our knowledge of the past or whether they also refer to aspects of the actual past. This insoluble problem suggested that the line of demarcation between the first two levels was not as clear as epistemological philosophy of history had always liked to believe. However, these problems—if recognized at all—went unheeded, like Kuhn's anomalies that are "set aside for a future generation with more developed tools."⁴⁰ It was only after the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory* that these "anomalies" were to take on a new significance.

40. T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1970, 84.

2. NARRATIVIST PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Before determining White's place in the evolution of Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history, it would be worthwhile to take a step back to compare philosophy of history with developments in other philosophical fields.

Philosophy of science has known an orthodoxy very similar to the one I have just sketched for philosophy of history. Philosophers of science also believed that a strict distinction could be made between physical reality itself, science, and philosophy of science, in such a way that nothing appearing on one level could also appear on one of the other two levels. What has happened in philosophy of science—thanks to the efforts of Quine, Searle, Davidson, Kuhn, and, above all, Rorty—is that the distinctions among these three levels have become blurred, while a strong “historical wind” has started to blow through the cracks in the epistemological scheme. This is what can be expected when the certainties of an old orthodoxy have not yet been replaced by new ones—as seems to be the case at present. In this respect, our present predicament offers a striking illustration of Nancy Struever's intriguing thesis that history and a sense of history can only flourish when absolute certainties (either philosophical, theological, or scientific) have fallen into disrepute.⁴¹ History, with its interest in the “intermediate and relative,”⁴² has always been the archenemy of absolute truths and the formal schemes claiming to justify these truths.

The attack on orthodoxy in philosophy of science started with Quine's rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction. A short exposition of Quine's argument—however familiar his argument may be—cannot be left out of the story to be told here. Quine saw three possible noncircular ways of defining analyticity or synonymy: 1) synonymy by definition; 2) by interchangeability of the terms for which a relation of analyticity is claimed (having the same extension); and 3) on the basis of semantic rules.⁴³ Quine's argument is, roughly, that these three definitions, each in its own way, only record the *fact* that two phrases are considered to be synonymous, without either explaining or justifying this fact. Take, for instance, the attempt to make definition the basis of analyticity. Quine writes: “but ordinarily such a definition . . . is pure lexicography, affirming a relation of synonymy antecedent to the exposition at hand.”⁴⁴ In the same way, in the other two cases, empirical statements of fact are also the only and the

41. N. S. Struever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance*, Princeton, 1970. Similar ideas can be found in V. Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism in the Renaissance*, Ithaca and London, 1985.

42. Struever, *Language*, 6.

43. W. V. O. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” in Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* [1953], Cambridge (MA), 1971, 24ff.

44. *Ibid.*, 34.

ultimate basis for our intuition concerning analyticity. Quine is therefore able to conclude: "for all its apriori reasonableness, a boundary between analytical and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn. That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith."⁴⁵ There is another consideration that can be added to Quine's argument. An attempt to establish analyticity presupposes a level on which criteria or definitions for analyticity are given, and a lower level to which these definitions or criteria can be applied. However, it is impossible to uphold the distinction between these levels, since each attempt at a definition implies the appearance on the higher level of statements like "analyticity is . . . ," presupposing already our capacity to recognize analyticity (which was supposed to be found only on the lower level).

This last consideration may lend extra support to Quine's claim that, with the rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction, the line of demarcation between philosophy of science (the higher or meta-level) and science (the lower or object level) has become considerably less distinct. The philosopher of science reconstructs the scientist's reasoning and is expected to demonstrate that the scientist's reasoning from R_1 to R_2 is analytical or correct in a formal sense. If, then, the analytic/synthetic distinction has to be rejected, the line of demarcation between the supposedly synthetic statements of the scientist and the supposedly analytic statements of the philosopher of science has disintegrated. Abandoning the distinction results in "a blurring of the supposed boundary between speculative metaphysics and natural sciences";⁴⁶ instead of this boundary, there will be a domain shared by the scientist and the philosopher of science, where they can talk to each other in the same language.

There is another argument to the same effect. It is clear that the analytic dimension corresponds to the formal aspects of the scientist's reasoning, whereas the synthetic dimension corresponds to its content. If Quine is correct, neither the philosopher of science nor the philosopher of history can ignore the content of scientific or historical inquiry (the orthodox view left this exclusively to either the scientist or the historian). It is interesting that this argument can be reversed. For it can be shown independently of what has already been said that the form/content dichotomy is also an illusion. Thus Goodman, who had attacked the analytic/synthetic distinction even before Quine, demonstrated that what is said (content) cannot be clearly distinguished from the way it is said (form): "saying dif-

45. Ibid., 37.

46. Ibid., 20.

ferent things [content] may count as different ways [form] of talking about something more comprehensive that contains both."⁴⁷

We can return to the results of the debate on the analytic/synthetic distinction with the following words of Rorty:

However . . . Quine's "Two dogmas of empiricism" challenged this distinction, and with it the standard notion (common to Kant, Husserl, and Russell) that philosophy stood to empirical science as the study of structure to the study of content. Given Quine's doubts (buttressed by similar doubts in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*) about how to tell when we are responding to the compulsion of "language" rather than that of "experience," it became difficult to explain in what sense philosophy had a separate "formal" field of inquiry, and thus how its results might have the desired apodictic character. For these two challenges were challenges to the very idea of "a theory of knowledge" and thus to philosophy itself, conceived of as a discipline which centers around such a theory.⁴⁸

The snag in Rorty's eloquent statement is his assertion that we shall not always be able to tell with certainty whether "we are responding to the compulsion of 'language' rather than that of 'experience.'" It should be observed, furthermore, that Rorty's assertion is of specific importance for a nonformalized discipline like historiography. For it will be obvious, in view of the remark by Goodman quoted above, that in historiography it is particularly difficult to distinguish between what is said and how it is said. Consequently, historiography is *preeminently* the discipline where "the compulsion of language" tends to be confused with "the compulsion of experience" and where that which *seems* to be a debate on reality is *in fact* a debate on the language we use. The examples I mentioned at the end of the last section may very well prove to be only the tip of the iceberg. A linguistic philosophy of history is therefore badly needed.

It is from this Rortyan vantage point that we are able to assess the growing interest in historical narrative in recent Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history. When philosophy of history finally joined in the linguistic turn in Anglo-Saxon philosophy it did so under the guise of narrativism. In fact, one of the most peculiar characteristics of Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history is that it was so reluctant to develop a linguistic philosophy of history. Most Anglo-Saxon philosophy has been a philosophy of language since the wane of neopositivism. However, neither the CLM nor analytical hermeneutics has ever shown much interest in the characteristics of the historian's language. Only rarely did philosophers of history see historical con-

47. N. Goodman, "The Status of Style," in Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hassocks, 1978, 26.

48. R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Oxford, 1980, 169.

cepts like “the Enlightenment” or “revolution”—despite their prominent roles in historical debate—as fruitful topics for serious philosophical investigation, and W. H. Walsh’s pioneering work on his so-called *colligatory concepts* unfortunately failed to undermine narrowly realist and positivist presuppositions.⁴⁹ In fact, both the CLM and analytical hermeneutics have always remained remarkably close to quasi-positivist ideals—oddly enough, since, of all academic disciplines, history is undoubtedly the least amenable to positivist treatment. And even nowadays we still find many philosophers of history who are amazingly indifferent to both actual historical practice and to all developments in philosophy of language since, say, Wittgenstein. An example of this is McCullagh’s recent book.⁵⁰ For all its merits, this book contains little that could not have been said in the 1940s.

That does not mean that the transition from epistemological philosophy of history to narrativist philosophy of history was made overnight. It may be useful to distinguish three phases or forms of narrativism. The first form of narrativism is exemplified in the works of Gallie and Louch.⁵¹ This narrativism could be called psychological, since it concentrated on the question of which psychological mechanisms the historian has to mobilize in the minds of his readers if they are to follow his story about the past. Although serious objections can be made regarding the psychological approach,⁵² part of it can be salvaged if recast as a theory concerning the role of rhetoric in historiography. This might transform psychological philosophy of history at least partly into a purely linguistic philosophy of history.

In a later phase, the CLM was the source of inspiration for narrativist philosophy of history.⁵³ M. White and A. C. Danto saw the historical narrative as a series of “narrative arguments,” to use the latter’s term. That is to say, the historian’s narrative mentions a number of events that can be interrelated by means of covering laws. White and Danto differed as to the exact nature of this connection, but both agreed that what has often been referred to as “genetic explanations” provides us with the model for historical narrative. The well-deserved popularity of Danto’s book did much to contribute to the success of this view of historical narrative. In the

49. Walsh, *Introduction to Philosophy of History*, 59ff.; W. H. Walsh, “Colligatory Concepts in History,” in P. Gardiner, ed., *The Philosophy of History*, London, 1974, 127–145; L. B. Cebik, “Colligation in the Writing of History,” *The Monist* 53 (1969): 40–57.

50. C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, Cambridge (Eng.), 1984.

51. W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, New York, 1968; A. R. Louch, “History as Narrative,” *History and Theory* 8 (1969): 54–70.

52. F. R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian’s Language*, The Hague, 1983, 12–19.

53. Danto, *History*, 249ff.; M. White, *Foundations*, chap. 6.

Anglo-Saxon debate on philosophy of history, Danto's book has filled a role somewhat comparable to that of Aquinas's *Summa* in the Middle Ages. Like Aquinas, Danto succeeded in epitomizing most of what had already been done; both caught the spirit of the time and convincingly solved a number of problems that still remained. Above all, where Aquinas opened a window to the future with his concept of reason, Danto, with his interest in historical narrative, gave modernity some latitude, while his insistence on the role of the CLM prevented this "narrativist fad" from really getting out of hand. This probably explains the enthusiastic reaction of philosophers of history to Danto's analysis of the so-called "narrative sentences,"⁵⁴ although it was obvious, as Murphey was quick to point out,⁵⁵ that the significance of these narrative sentences for an understanding of historiography was slight. For it is not the historians' capacity to describe the past in new ways—as emphasized by Danto—but their capacity to develop new *interpretations*, that makes us continuously see the past in a new light. However, more important, it can be demonstrated that conformity with the CLM is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for an acceptable historical narrative.⁵⁶

Finally, analytical hermeneutics never became the point of departure for the development of a more or less well-defined narrativist philosophy of history, although, admittedly, philosophers like Dray, Carr, and especially Olafson have come close to it.⁵⁷ I find it hard to explain this fact. It may be that the aversion of analytical hermeneutics to the perspective of the unintended consequences of intentional action proved to be an insurmountable barrier (absent, of course, for the CLM). It is instructive that Carr took particular exception to Mink's characteristically narrativist statement that "stories are not lived but told"⁵⁸ and made every conceivable effort to "pull back" the narrative into the sphere of intentional human action. A similar tendency can be observed in Olafson's work.⁵⁹

Thus linguistic, narrativist philosophy of history only made its appearance in its true colors with the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory*.

54. Danto, *History*, chap. 8; Danto has in mind sentences like, "The Thirty Years War begins in 1618," that refer to *two* events (both the beginning of the war and its end in 1648) while describing only *one* of these events.

55. M. G. Murphey, *Our Knowledge of the Historical Past*, Indianapolis, 1973: 113ff.

56. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 36–47.

57. W. H. Dray, "On the Nature and Role of Narrative in Historiography," *History and Theory* 10 (1971): 153–171; D. Carr, "Review of Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*," *History and Theory* 23 (1984), especially 364ff.; D. Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," *History and Theory* 25 (1986): 117–131; F. A. Olafson, *The Dialectic of Action*, Chicago, 1979, *passim*.

58. Carr, "Narrative," 118.

59. F. A. Olafson, *The Dialectic of Action*, Chicago, 1979, 160ff.

Kellner accurately states that never had a philosopher of history written "a book so fully and openly about language."⁶⁰ Since this most revolutionary work on philosophy of history has already been carefully analyzed and discussed on many occasions, I shall restrict myself to a few comments that have to be made if we want to ascertain White's position in the evolution of the debate in philosophy of history.⁶¹

The linguistic turn announces itself unambiguously in White's philosophy when he compares the historical past itself with a text.⁶² Just like a text, the past possesses a meaning that we are trying to discover, it needs interpretation, and consists of lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic elements. Therefore, what the historian essentially does is translate the text of the past into the narrative text of the historian.⁶³ This translation procedure is always guided by either one or more of the four tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony. This most original and surprising view has baffled many of White's readers. His argument in favor of this tropological view of historiography can be epitomized as follows: When we have to interpret a text (for instance, the text of the past), we are, in fact, looking for a guide to show us how to understand this text of the past. This guide finds its embodiment in the historical narrative:

As a symbolic structure, the historical narrative does not reproduce the events it describes; it tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about the events with different emotional valences. The historical narrative does not *imagine* the things it indicates; it *calls to mind* images of the things it indicates, in the same way that a metaphor does. . . . The metaphor does not *image* the things it seeks to characterize, it *gives directions* for finding the set of images that are intended to be associated with that thing.⁶⁴

This crucial passage teaches us two things. First, it is here that philosophy of history explicitly abandons the epistemological approach and becomes a philosophy of language. Naive realism, according to which a historical account of the past is like a picture that is tied to the past itself by epistemological bonds, is rejected; rather, the historical narrative is a complex linguistic structure specially built for the purpose of showing part of

60. H. Kellner, "A Bedrock of Order: Hayden White's Linguistic Humanism," *History and Theory*, Beiheft 19 (1980): 1-30.

61. H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, 1973; H. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore, 1978; the essays in this volume are indispensable for a satisfactory assessment of White's position.

62. White, *Metahistory*, 30.

63. It is doubtful whether the claim that the past is a text could be seen as more than a metaphor; obviously, the fact that both can be interpreted is insufficient proof of its literal truth.

64. White, *Tropics*, 91.

the past. In other words, the historian's language is not a transparent, passive medium *through* which we can see the past, as we do perceive what is written in a letter through the glass paperweight lying on top of it. As I have argued elsewhere,⁶⁵ the historian's language has more in common with a belvedere: we do not look at the past *through* the historian's language, but *from* the vantage point suggested by it. The historian's language does not strive to make itself invisible like the glass paperweight of the epistemological model, but it wishes to take on the same solidity and opacity as a thing. I shall return to this opacity of the historian's language presently.

And, second, since metaphors like "my love is a rose" suggest similar vantage points, are similar guides for how to look at a part of (past) reality, we can conclude that narrative language is essentially metaphorical or tropological. Metaphors always show us something in terms of something else; the metaphor I just mentioned invites us to see our beloved from the point of view of everything we have learned to associate with roses. However, the rose is not related to the beloved by epistemological ties or rules; in very much the same way, the historical narrative will put to shame all epistemological efforts to fasten the historian's language to the past it is about.

At this point we should consider Danto's view that, from a logical standpoint, metaphor closely resembles intensional contexts, such as we encounter in statements like "*m* believes that *p*." In this statement, *p* cannot be replaced by *s* where *p* and *s* refer to the same state of affairs, nor by *q*, even though *p* entails *q*. "Intensional contexts are such because the sentences in whose formation they enter are about specific sentences—or about specific representations—and not about whatever those sentences or representations would be about were they to occur outside those contexts."⁶⁶ And the same is true for metaphor since "metaphor presents its subject and presents the way in which it does present it."⁶⁷ Both metaphor and the historical narrative display this intensional nature and therefore have an element of self-referentiality; they refer to themselves insofar as the precise way they are formulated has also to be taken into account if we are to assess their truth or plausibility. Metaphor and the historical narrative have the density and opacity we ordinarily associate only with things or objects; in a way, they *are* things.⁶⁸ The combined force of White's and

65. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 223.

66. A. C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Cambridge (MA), 1983, 187; this book has more to offer to the philosopher of history than the author's *Analytical Philosophy of History*.

67. Danto, *Transfiguration*, 189.

68. For a formal proof of this claim, see chapter 2 in this volume. It is not surprising that Renaissance humanism had a similar intuition about language being a thing (the trans-

Danto's arguments thus demonstrates the referential opacity of both the historical narrative and the metaphor, and hence the essential shortcoming of the belief in the transparency of language characteristic of all epistemological philosophy of history. The historian's task is to offer us not a reflection or model of the past tied to that past by certain translation rules,⁶⁹ but the development of a more or less autonomous instrument that can be used for understanding the past. One can agree with LaCapra's apt remark that White's theory stresses the "making" or "poetic" function of narrative at the expense of the "matching" function that has always been so dear to the mimetic epistemology of positivism.⁷⁰

This insight may serve to clarify an aspect of White's thesis that has puzzled many of his readers. On what level do his rhetorical tropes function? Is a metaphorical, metonymical (and so on) reduction executed on *the past itself*, so that only that which is related in a metaphorical, metonymical way to certain parts of the past is mentioned in the historical narrative? Or should metaphorical, metonymical relations only be conceived of on the level of our *speaking* about the past? Or, a third possibility, do metaphor, metonymy, and so on function only in the *transition* from the past itself to our "narrative" language? However, as soon as we reject, as did White, the traditional epistemological presupposition of the historian's language as a mirror of the past, it is no longer meaningful to ask this question, and White was correct in omitting the suggestion of any kind of answer.

Having stated the essentially metaphorical character of the historical narrative, White reminds us that metaphor is only one of the four tropes. Here White follows Giambattista Vico, but he also seeks the support of writers as diverse as Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Piaget.⁷¹ His stylistic repertory thus embraces metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. We might now ask ourselves whether it is not conceivable that there are more tropes—or possibly even fewer, should two or more tropes prove to be reducible to one. White has tried to show that there is a kind of logical sequence among the tropes, metaphor leading to metonymy, metonymy to synecdoche, synecdoche to irony, and irony ultimately bringing us back to metaphor.⁷² If we consider White's arguments to be convincing, we can

parency view of language is better suited to the sciences that have come into existence since the seventeenth century). See M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, 1973, 34–46.

69. White, *Tropics*, 88.

70. D. LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language*, Ithaca, 1983, 76.

71. White, *Tropics*, 5ff.; similar ideas were also developed by Nietzsche in the courses on rhetoric he gave as a young professor in Basel. See P. Lacoue-Labarthe and J. Nancy, "Friedrich Nietzsche: rhétorique et langage," *Poétique* 2 (1971): 99–141.

72. White, *Tropics*, 5; it is interesting that as early as the sixteenth century a similar claim was made by La Popelinière. See G. Huppert, *The Idea of Perfect History*, Urbana, Ill., 1971, 161ff.

conclude that the system of the four tropes shows neither “gaps” nor duplication. It should be noted that, on the one hand, the advantage of this line of argument is that all historical writing can now be absorbed into White’s stylistic scheme; but on the other hand, it has the less desirable consequence of predetermining what the aim and the course of all meaningful historical discussion should be: historical debate is condemned to follow the circle of the four tropes. However, if White is correct in claiming that this *corso e ricorso* of historical styles can actually be observed in the history of historical writing, we must accept the fact whether we like it or not. This would, of course, entail a kind of apotheosis of the linguistic, narrativist approach. For, the conclusion now becomes inevitable that the logical relation among the four tropes (a fact about the historian’s language), and not historical data, is the compass in both historical writing and discussion. White’s sensitivity to “the compulsion of language” thus becomes even more pronounced than Rorty’s.

This is how the revolution from epistemological to narrativist philosophy of history was enacted in White’s work: a revolution which made philosophy of history finally catch up with the developments in philosophy since the works of Quine, Kuhn, and Rorty.

3. LOOKING AHEAD

White’s achievement can be summed up as follows: First, philosophy of history finally, belatedly, underwent its linguistic turn and became part of the contemporary intellectual scene. Second, the emphasis on explanation and description—a legacy from the positivist phase—was abandoned in favor of concentration on historical interpretation. Third, the fixation on the details of historical studies was replaced by an interest in the totality of a historical work and the awareness that what requires the attention of the philosopher of history most is to be found only on *that* level. Fourth, since narrative language logically is a thing, and things do not entertain epistemological relations, the epistemological paradigm could be discarded. Fifth, the traditional dichotomy of the orthodox epistemological view, contrasting things in the past with the language of the historian, no longer has any meaning or justification. Sixth, the traditional selection problem of what should and what should not be said about a historical topic is rephrased as a problem about style. It is recognized that style is not a mere idiom of historical writing: style does not only concern the *manner* but also the *matter* of historiography, to use the words of Peter Gay.⁷³ And, seventh, the antihistorism of the epistemological tradition is

73. P. Gay, *Style in History*, London, 1975, 3.

avoided since the strangeness of the past is no longer reduced to the comforting certainties embodied in covering laws, in *normic* statements (Scriven), or in the principles of philosophy of action.

From this perspective, a few comments can and should be made concerning Ricoeur's recent *Time and Narrative*. Perhaps no book in the field of philosophy of history since World War II has shown a greater wealth of learning, a more equitable assessment of what has been done up until now, or a greater talent for synthesizing different and heterogeneous traditions. This magisterial book is a landmark in philosophy of history and will have to be closely studied by everyone interested in narrativism. We encounter in Ricoeur's book two familiar Whitean theses. Ricoeur also believes that the historical narrative is essentially metaphorical. And, when he discusses what he calls *mimesis* (which is an infelicitous term, since it suggests everything that narrativism has always found objectionable in the epistemological tradition), Ricoeur emphasizes, as does White, the autonomy of the historian's language with regard to the actual past. However, from then on, Ricoeur lags far behind White; for nowhere do these two insights induce Ricoeur to investigate the historian's language. It is as if we were brought to a newly discovered world but were not allowed to take away the bandages from our eyes. It is quite characteristic that Ricoeur entirely omits the theory of the tropes in his exposition of White's narrativism. Although he explicitly professes his awareness of the injustice he thus does to White, the result inevitably is that the latter's views are now transformed into a body without a heart.⁷⁴

Two reasons can be given, I believe, for Ricoeur's tendency to revert from the narrativist tradition to the epistemological tradition. First, *narrative* for Ricoeur "attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."⁷⁵ Time is part of life as it is lived by human individuals and that fact must manifest itself in the historian's narrative. This is also why Ricoeur rejects Mink's view, according to which the historian's interpretation of the past is always a *seeing together* and not a reviewing *seriatim* of the separate phases of a historical development.⁷⁶ Hence Ricoeur's tendency to tie the historical narrative to the past in the way which had always been suggested by the epistemological tradition. Second, undoubtedly because of his phenomenological background, Ricoeur wants to lock up the historical narrative firmly within the confines of the perspective of the individual historical agent. Particularly instructive in this regard is the deep respect with which Ricoeur discusses Von Wright's *Explanation and*

74. P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Chicago, 1983, 163.

75. Ibid., 52.

76. Ibid., 155ff.

Understanding throughout his work, when most philosophers of history would not classify Von Wright's book as narrativist at all. In both cases, the result is a clipping of the wings of narrativism. This tendency also manifests itself in Ricoeur's proposal to redescribe those aspects of the past which are not easily reduced to a realist or anthropomorphic approach in terms of "quasi-characters," "quasi-plots," or "quasi-events" (this is how he deals with, for instance, Braudel's *longue durée*). Ricoeur thus attempts to neutralize the narrativist import of historiography, offering panoramic views of large parts of the past.

When I say that White's narrativism is far more developed than Ricoeur's, this does not mean that White's system could not be improved upon. This becomes clear if we take, once again, the recent developments in philosophy of science as our background in order to measure the progress made in philosophy of history. Here too, Rorty's views are most instructive. His book was essentially an attack on the epistemological tradition since Descartes. This attack had both a historical and a theoretical dimension to it. Historically, it can be shown that epistemological concerns did not arise before the seventeenth century. Before that time, philosophy had no use for epistemology, since the modern notion of the mind as a *forum internum*, in which truths about the world (and about the physical self) were mirrored, was created for the first time by Descartes.⁷⁷ For Aristotle, and within the Aristotelian tradition, seeing was knowing and not a mere datum for this *forum internum* of the knowing mind.⁷⁸ Where the Aristotelians were content with just the world and our knowledge of the world, Cartesian epistemology introduced this third notion of a *forum internum*, in which the world mirrors itself, and whose smooth surface we examine in order to acquire knowledge. Epistemology was given the task of bridging the gap that had now inadvertently been created by the knowing subject's abandonment of reality for this *forum internum*. With great acumen and talent for estranging the past from its Whiggish codification which we all accepted, Rorty succeeds in showing why this Cartesian postulate of a *forum internum* should be seen as the birthplace of modern philosophy—of epistemology and of modern philosophy of science. For since Descartes, all philosophers have agreed that this *forum internum*—whose operations were believed to be clearly statable—is the sole sanctuary of all truth and reason. Only those beliefs that have come into being in accordance with the rules and under the jurisprudence obtaining in the *forum internum* can count as knowledge. Kant's critical philosophy was, of course, the apogee of this evolution in Western philosophy. Hence the peculiar

77. Rorty, *Mirror*, 50.

78. *Ibid.*, 45.

inference so characteristic of most Western philosophy since the Middle Ages, from knowledge of the *mind* (of the transcendental ego) to the knowledge we have of *reality*.

However, Rorty was not content to have demonstrated merely that our trust in epistemology and philosophy of science is no more than a historical accident. The greatest part of his book is devoted to demolishing (by means of arguments drawn from the work of Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, and Kuhn) this notion of an ahistorical *forum internum* as the repository of truth. He shows that if all mentalistic language derived from the acceptance of the *forum internum* conception is eliminated, nothing essential will have been lost.⁷⁹ Consequently, epistemology as we understand it is an intellectual enterprise whose very *raison d'être* is doubtful—to say the least—and Rorty urges us to replace it by what he refers to as *epistemological behaviorism*. That is to say, problems concerning the relation between language and reality should not be transformed into problems concerning the workings of our minds; they can only be solved by finding out what we actually believe and what reasons we have for doing so. Briefly, the problems epistemologists attempted to answer can only be solved by looking at the results of scientific research; how language relates to reality is not an epistemological question but a scientific one. And Rorty does not hesitate to ridicule the absurd claim on the part of philosophers that they should have both the duty and the capacity to “found” the sciences.

This, however, is only part of the story; for we must be aware that each discipline has its favorite philosophical bugbear. For the sciences this philosophical bugbear is not epistemology, but metaphysics. Both the sciences and metaphysics claim to investigate the nature of reality and are therefore each other's natural rivals. Metaphysics, and not epistemology, has suffered the heaviest blows from the development of modern science. Epistemology was tolerated as an irrelevant pastime for idle philosophers from which no real harm was to be expected. In historiography, on the other hand, the reverse is the case. Historians can afford to be indifferent to metaphysical investigations into the ultimate nature of the past. In the same way as epistemology is—in the Rortyan view—the philosopher's answer to what is essentially a scientific question, speculative philosophies of history are the philosopher's way of dealing with the problems of the historian. However, the epistemology of, for instance, the CLM and analytical hermeneutics really has the capacity to derail historical writing. That the triumph of analytical hermeneutics would mean the end of historiography as we know it needs no elucidation. Gadamer was correct, therefore, when he saw *method*, rather than Hegel or Marx, as the most serious enemy of

79. Ibid., chap. 2.

the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Consequently, Rorty's condemnation of epistemology is nowhere more to the point than in the case of historiography.

From this perspective, it might be considered a shortcoming of White's philosophy of history that it is still not entirely free of "foundational" epistemological undertones. White himself has recognized the Kantian nature of some of his ideas, and it cannot be denied that the role assigned to the tropes is very similar to that of the Kantian categories in synthesizing knowledge. On the other hand, since White is not very outspoken about where and how the tropes affect our understanding of the past (see above), it might be hard to give much substance to the claim that White's tropology is another variant of foundational epistemology. Besides, his thesis that—if pressed hard enough—each trope will give way to another reinforces the purely linguistic, nonepistemological nature of the tropes. However, in whatever light we look at it, the idea that there are essentially only these four ways of representing the past will never quite lose its less fortunate "foundational" ring.

We have now arrived at a vantage point from which we can take a glimpse into the hazy landscape of the future of philosophy of history. From now on we must firmly resist the temptation of the Cartesian metaphor of the *glassy essence* of the knowing subject or of the language he uses. We do not look through language at (past) reality; the historian's language is not a medium wanting to erase itself. The point has been forcefully stated by Culler: Philosophy and science in their epistemological cloak always "aimed at putting an end to writing."⁸⁰ If a problem has been solved, it was believed, writing about it comes to an end; looking *through* writing and language, we now observe the workings of nature and of reality themselves. Especially in historiography, this picture is utterly misleading. In historiography, "paradoxically, the more powerful and authoritative an interpretation, the more writing it generates."⁸¹ The great books in the field of the history of historiography, the works of Ranke, de Tocqueville, Marx, Burckhardt, Huizinga, Meinecke, or Braudel, do not put an end to a historical debate, do not give us the feeling that we now finally know how things actually were in the past and that clarity has ultimately been achieved. On the contrary: these books have proved to be the most powerful stimulators of the production of *more* writing; their effect is thus to estrange us from the past, instead of placing it upon a kind of pedestal in a historiographical museum so that we can inspect it from all possible perspectives.

The truly interesting historical text does not "wipe itself out" (by having

80. J. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, London, 1983, 90.

81. *Ibid.*

removed an item from the list of historical problems) but has a *metaphorical* relation to itself. Since it stimulates more writing, there is a sense in which it, just like a metaphor, does not mean what it literally says. In this connection Derrida used the words *différance* and *intertextuality*. Derrida's thesis that texts may differ from themselves (a most peculiar feature they have, which leads Derrida to prefer the term *différance* to the regular French word *différence*) can, in fact, best be illustrated by means of historical texts. As I have pointed out elsewhere, if we have only *one* historical interpretation of some historical topic, we have no interpretation.⁸² An interpretative way of seeing the past can only be recognized as such in the presence of *other* ways of seeing the past. Narrative interpretations mutually define each other and therefore owe their identity to their *intertextual* relations.

Consequently, a maximum of clarity can only be obtained in historiography thanks to a *proliferation* of historical interpretations and not by attempting to *reduce* their number. Historiography can therefore never afford to become forgetful of its past; even past interpretations which we reject at present should still be remembered in order to define the identity of the interpretations we now prefer. The proliferation thesis also requires us to respect the uniqueness and *différance* of each historical interpretation. I would therefore disagree with White's proposal to categorize narrative interpretations by means of the four tropes. This proposal has, moreover, a practical disadvantage. In the heat of the theoretical debate, we must not forget that (new) historical data sometimes succeed in discrediting certain historical interpretations. As we have seen, there is in White's analysis a probably unintended tendency to suggest that historical controversy is purely linguistic. And that would be going too far. Here we must bear in mind two things. First, narrative interpretations are the instruments—linguistic objects—created by historians in order to make sense of part of the past. Surely the debate about the merits and shortcomings of historical interpretations is a debate about these *linguistic* objects. However, we must not forget that it is always the historical data mentioned by the historian which makes them into the objects they are. Second, the succession from metaphorical interpretations to metonymical interpretations, from metonymical interpretations to synecdochical interpretations, and so on could not provide us with a criterion for interpretative success. This is not because it would be the wrong criterion, which should be replaced by a better one, but simply because each historical interpretation is already, in itself, a criterion for interpretative success. For, each historical interpretation can be taken as meaning: "if you look at the past from this perspective, that is your best guarantee for understanding part of the

82. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 239.

past." Each historical interpretation is essentially the proposal of a criterion for what requirements are to be met if we want to understand part of the past.

But are there no criteria for these criteria, White might object. I do not think so, since I presume that these two sets of criteria will inevitably coalesce. It will be impossible to satisfy the higher set of criteria without satisfying the lower, and vice versa. One cannot make sense of the suggestion that an interpretation is sound on one level but not on another (obviously, I am speaking here not of *several separate* parts of the past being interpreted, but of *one and the same* part of the past). Therefore, historiography knows no interesting and generally applicable criteria for distinguishing between satisfactory and unsatisfactory interpretations. (I deliberately use the phrase "interesting criteria," for it will be obvious that the historian should, for instance, not misread his sources and should avoid the kind of mistakes in logic of which Fischer has made us aware.)⁸³ All we have is the *intertextual* interplay between the historical narratives we happen to have on some topic. Therefore, if these criteria are to be found *anywhere*, then it is in *this* set of historical narratives which have actually been written on *this* topic. Outside such sets, there are no interesting criteria, either general or specific, for interpretative certainty and validity. I have obviously repeated here, but from a different perspective, the by now familiar Rortyan rejection of epistemological foundationalism. Historiography is itself the source of its own interpretative certainties and not the result of the application of some previously given set of such certainties. Like a dike covered with ice floes at the end of the winter, the past has been covered by a thick crust of narrative interpretations; and historical debate is as much a debate about the components of this crust as about the past hidden beneath it.

The most conspicuous failure of pre-Whitean, epistemological philosophy of history was to ignore this thick crust of narrativist interpretations. One lost sight of the fact that historical disagreement does not only concern the past itself but also the linguistic objects created by historians to understand the past. The most interesting question with regard to historiography—the question of why historians prefer one interpretation of a *specific* historical topic (the question should not be generalized) to another—was never asked. It is as if philosophers of science had never sought to deal with the growth of scientific knowledge and had restricted themselves to the problem of how to ascertain individual data without paying attention to theory and concept formation. For if there is anything in historiography that is analogous to theory formation in the sciences, then it is historical interpretation and *not* the description or explanation of individual historical facts (in which the epistemological tradition was so interested).

83. D. H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, London, 1971.

The similarity between interpretation in history (which often results in the introduction of a new concept, such as *Mannerism* or *the Cold War*) and concept and theory formation in the sciences might even prove to be a useful guide for the solution of problems in philosophy of science. In a brilliant article, MacIntyre has argued that in the Kuhnian paradigm changes, the paradigm to be preferred is the one that enables us to tell the most convincing story of the part of the history of science which gave rise to the paradigm change.⁸⁴ One may surmise that at least some of the problems that puzzle contemporary philosophers of science, like concept formation or the incommensurability of scientific theories, can be demonstrated *ad oculos* by looking at what happens in historiographical debate. For, the kind of debates we find in the history of science during those relatively rare periods of scientific revolution are endemic in historiography. Moreover, there are some striking resemblances between the narrativist's thesis of the autonomy of historical language with regard to the past and model-theoretical and instrumentalist interpretations of scientific theories since Ramsey. The relations between history and science could thus be studied from a far more rewarding and interesting point of view than the one suggested by theorists of the CLM. One can observe here a curious and even depressing paradox. Who could fail to be aware of how deeply philosophy of science has historicized itself since Kuhn? In one way or another, philosophers of history have managed to ignore completely this change of front in philosophy of science. Strangely enough, contemporary philosophy of science is far more historicist than philosophy of history—with the exception, of course, of the antiepistemologist narrativist tradition since White.

This is the dilemma of contemporary philosophy of history. Will philosophy of history continue its classical epistemologist tradition, or is it prepared to investigate the kind of philosophical problems described in this essay? If philosophy of history is content to become an odd positivist fossil in the contemporary intellectual world within the next four years, by all means let it remain epistemologist. If, however, philosophers of history have the courage to shake off their own past and entertain a sincere wish to contribute to a better understanding not only of historiography but also of the problems that are currently under debate in other philosophical disciplines, it cannot avoid becoming narrativist.

84. A. MacIntyre, "The Relationship of Philosophy to Its Past," in R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Q. Skinner, eds., *Philosophy in History*, Cambridge (Eng.), 1984, 31–49.

THREE

The Use of Language in the Writing of History

1. INTRODUCTION: THE ENLIGHTENED AND THE ROMANTICIST VIEWS OF SOCIAL REALITY

Modern historiography as we know it is the result of the victory of Romanticism over the Enlightened view of the social order. The Enlightenment conception of sociohistorical reality found its most characteristic expression in the so-called natural-law philosophies of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.¹ Natural-law philosophy assumes that a natural order can be discovered in social reality; this natural order should be the guiding principle in the organization of (political) society.

Natural-law philosophy is only possible if an intrinsic harmony between the individual and society is either explicitly or implicitly agreed upon. Nevertheless, this condition for the very possibility of natural-law philosophy was not only passed over by natural-law philosophers themselves, but has also escaped the attention of many modern commentators. An exception is Spragens. Discussing Hobbes's natural-law philosophy, Spragens clarifies this idea of a "preestablished" harmony between the individual and society by means of the following simile:

The present political situation from which I begin my analysis, he [Hobbes] might say, is rather like the situation of a broken watch. The watch repairman, when he comes to fix it, must take it apart and put it back together

1. The terms *Enlightenment* and *Romanticism* are used here to designate only the most conspicuous tendencies in these periods. Since F. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, München, 1936; and P. H. Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism*, Berkeley, 1975, it has been common knowledge that the origins of a historicist view of sociohistorical reality can be traced back to the beginning of the eighteenth century.

properly, with the parts arranged this time in accordance with their nature. In the same way, Hobbes would argue, I have come upon a society broken and disordered by civil strife, taken it apart into its fundamental constituent parts, and imaginatively recomposed it into the ordered whole which is consonant with the nature of those parts.²

The crucial assumption is, therefore, that just like the parts of a watch, the nature of human individuals is such that they can, in principle, be "put together" within the whole of a well-functioning political society. At the end of the eighteenth century, when natural-law philosophy was already beginning to lose its plausibility, the same tacit assumption can still be detected in Kant's political philosophy. For Kant, the perfect human individual is in complete harmony with the perfect political order. History will eventually achieve this identification of the human individual with political society. Human egoism, which one might initially believe to obstruct the complete socialization of the human individual is, on the contrary, the *causa efficiens* of the process; for rational human beings will see that to identify oneself with the social order is in one's own egoist interest.³ Thus, in natural-law philosophy there has always been a sort of transparency in the relation between the individual and the social order, such that neither contains any elements alien to the other. Each is fundamentally unenigmatic when seen from the perspective of the other. It should not be inferred from this that natural-law philosophy presents us with an overly optimistic and idyllic picture of society; natural-law philosophers could at times be quite cynical. The idea is merely that the problem of the relation between the individual and society in principle permits a rational solution.

Romanticism, with its discovery of the romantic self transcending every conceivable social definition of the human individual, meant the final break with the conceptions of Enlightened natural-law philosophy. The individual, at least as far as the essence of his individuality is concerned, left the social order, and the conflict between the individual and society became irremediable and permanent. The failure of the French Revolution in its attempt to create a political society in accordance with natural-law philosophy, and the grotesque disproportion between its noble ideals and the realities of the guillotine and the law of Prairial 20th were the historical expression of this cleavage between the individual and society.⁴ Both

2. T. A. Spragens, Jr., *The Politics of Motion: The World of Thomas Hobbes*, Kentucky, 1973, 153.

3. I. Kant, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlichen Absicht," in Kant, *Ausgewählte kleine Schriften*, Hamburg, 1969; see also G. Vlachos, *La pensée politique de Kant*, Paris, 1962, 193-225.

4. It is therefore doubtful whether one is right in seeing the origins of liberalism in the individualism of seventeenth and eighteenth century natural-law philosophy. It has already been shown in J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, London, 1952, that eighteenth

were recognized as having an autonomy of their own: the individual could not create society in his own image and vice versa. This secession of the individual from the social order is, arguably, the most dramatic occurrence in Western history in the last few centuries. The shock waves it has sent through the centuries can still be felt, and the traumas it caused in the consciousness of Western man are still with us today.⁵

In its wake followed a new awareness of the sociohistorical order that was both deeper and less self-confident than the Enlightened one preceding it. Hegel's philosophy of history may illustrate this point. In Hegel's philosophy of history the secession of the individual from the social order took the form of the insight that we may intend one thing and yet achieve something else. The social order places itself, so to speak, between our intentions and the results of our actions. Consequently, there is a systematic indeterminacy in the relation between our thinking about and our acting upon social reality on the one hand, and their results in the social order on the other.

This connection implies that in world history, thanks to the actions of individual human beings, something more is achieved than what they aimed at and what they brought about than they knew and they wished to achieve. They realize what their interest is, but something further is achieved as well, that was inherent in it, but that was not recognized by them and not part of their aim. (my translation)⁶

All our knowledge, both of ourselves and of the social order, will not prevent the social order from invariably distorting—sometimes beyond recognition—the way we intend to act upon it. The individual and society have become estranged from one another.

century individualism was far from being incompatible with totalitarian tendencies. A truly antitotalitarian liberalism requires the formal recognition of civil liberty, of a sphere where the individual is free from the influence of the state or of other collectivities. The discovery of this sphere runs parallel to the evolution sketched here and is ultimately based on the Romantic definition of the individual. An unambiguous definition of civil liberty has only been given by Benjamin Constant in his *De la liberté des anciens comparée à celle des modernes*, Paris, 1819.

5. One of the consequences was the division of the individual into a public and a private self; this development has been beautifully described by R. Sennett in his *The Fall of Public Man*, New York, 1976.

6. Jener Zusammenhang enthält nämlich dies, dass in der Weltgeschichte durch die Handlungen der Menschen noch etwas anderes überhaupt herauskomme, als sie bezwecken und erreichen, als sie unmittelbar wissen und wollen. Sie vollbringen ihr Interesse; aber es wird noch ein Ferneres damit zustande gebracht, das auch innerlich darin liegt, aber das nicht in ihrem Bewusstsein und ihrer Absicht lag. (G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1970, 88.)

At first sight, one might expect that sociohistorical reality had now been reduced one more time to the status of an unknowable *arcanum*, as it had been during the Middle Ages. Owing to Medieval man's concentration upon the "vertical" link between the individual and God or the *Civitas Dei* and his concomitant blindness regarding the "horizontal" link between the individuals in sociohistorical reality, Medieval man lacked an adequate conceptual instrument for understanding the social world he was living in.⁷ It would seem that Romanticism will have consequences analogous to those of Augustinianism. Not unlike the latter had done, Romanticism would throw the individual back into his own individual universe, while transforming sociohistorical reality into an impenetrable secret. As we all know, this obvious supposition is not in accordance with the facts. Think of Hegel himself. Thanks to his idealistic conviction that history was formed by the very same instrument the individual has at his disposal for understanding sociohistorical reality—Reason—Hegel succeeded in bridging the gap he had shown to exist between sociohistorical reality and the individual. However, in a certain sense, the supposition is correct. Paradoxically, it was precisely this transition from the certainties of the Enlightenment to the tormented wrestling of Romanticism with the nature of sociohistorical reality that gave birth to modern historiography. The past became strange, irrevocably closed in on itself and, therefore, interesting. The discovery of the distance between the individual and sociohistorical reality made Western man aware of his past with an intensity hitherto unknown. The past became an enigma, and modern historiography was created to meet the challenge.

This, however, is only part of the story, and not the part that will interest us here; for instead of explaining how modern historiography came into existence at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we might ask the more theoretical question of how historical knowledge is possible. For did not the Romantic *Weltanschauung* effectively rule out the possibility of adequate knowledge of history and society? We are confronted here with a problem that has perhaps never been successfully dealt with since the victory of Romanticism over the Enlightenment that gave rise to this problem. The social sciences have tried to avoid the problem by clinging to the Enlightenment dogma of the transparency of the social order, and they have found a powerful ally in ethically inspired political theories with the same ancestry; the gap between fact and value did not form an obstacle to their alliance, since the social sciences and ethics have in common an affinity with the general statement.

Historiography, however, could not get off so easily: it could not deny

7. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton, 1975; see especially Chapter 2. See also B. A. Haddock, *An Introduction to Historical Thought*, London, 1980, 1.

its Romanticist origins and, more specifically, its methodology stood in the way of its following the same strategy as the social sciences (although, with a certain degree of regularity, historians and philosophers of history alike have nevertheless attempted to do so). As a consequence, both historians and philosophers of history were often aware that there was something peculiarly problematic about their discipline and they customarily expressed their uneasiness by speaking about what they called the *ineradicable subjectivity* of the historian. Although historians and philosophers of history therefore recognized the consequences, for the reliability of their discipline, of the expulsion of the knowing subject from the social order, they rarely tackled the problem at its roots. Most often they tried to vindicate the scientific status of historiography by means of an attempt to demonstrate how historical knowledge is possible. "History, then, is a science, but a science of a special kind," to quote Collingwood.⁸ Both Dilthey's and Collingwood's hermeneutics were intended to answer the Kantian question as to how historical knowledge, being distinct from knowledge of physical reality, is possible. However, as we shall see later on, this Kantian epistemological approach is misguided, and that is why the philosophical problems historiography confronts us with have never been solved satisfactorily, even though numerous useful suggestions have been made over the last one-and-a-half centuries. For the ineluctable truth is that history is not a science and that it does not produce knowledge in the proper sense of the word. And we shall find that this is not as bad as one might initially suppose.

This contention will be defended below by considering, first, the general statement (i.e., the linguistic form we ordinarily associate with the expression of scientific knowledge) and, second, historical narrative (i.e., the linguistic form employed by historians).

2. THE ENLIGHTENMENT PARADIGM: THE GENERAL STATEMENT

It is universally acknowledged that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations. The same motives always produce the same actions. The same events follow from the same causes.⁹

This statement by David Hume is characteristic of the Enlightenment and of Enlightened natural-law philosophy. It must be emphasized that state-

8. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, London, 1970, 251. For a comprehensive discussion of Collingwood's relevant views, see W. J. Van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of Collingwood*, The Hague, 1981, chap. 7.

9. D. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Oxford, 1972, 83.

ments like these, contrary to appearances, always imply *two* things instead of only *one*. For suppose that we accept Hume's statement as it stands, next we try to formulate these general rules governing human action, but then discover that each individual natural-law philosopher or social scientist comes up with a different set of general rules, while all these sets appear to be mutually incompatible. In that case, the only possible conclusion is that no general rules have been found. For the discovery of general rules, the statements describing them are required to be *intersubjectively* acceptable, that is to say not only for *me* but also for *you* and *anybody else*. To put it differently, the general statement requires a general, or interchangeable knowing subject. The general statement and the general, interchangeable knowing subject are two sides of the same coin.

This world governed by general rules that can be discovered by the general, interchangeable knowing subject is, in principle at least, a world without impenetrable secrets. Even the most obvious limit of human knowledge, the transcendental human knowing subject himself, can be transgressed here, for the generality of the knowing subject guarantees the possibility of general knowledge. It may be that the social sciences will fail us and that we shall have to have recourse to philosophy. Probably philosophy has a chance of success here. For the fact that we do not believe that the problems that inspired Descartes, Kant, or Wittgenstein were meaningless problems proves that this is how we think. The knowing subject is, so to speak, "at home" here, in the world investigated by him; no part of the world investigated by him exceeds the bounds of what he could possibly know. This is the paradigm cherished by Hume, by the natural-law philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and their modern heirs, the social scientists. Knowledge is knowledge of general rules that is in the possession of a generalized knowing subject.

This parallelism between the general states of affairs on the one hand, that are known by a general and interchangeable knowing subject on the other, implies the transparency of language. Clashed between the general states of affairs described by the general statement on the one hand and the general knowing subject on the other, the general meanings of the words of language remain fixed, and language does not have a chance to be creative or imaginative. Like the paperweight through which we see the text underneath, language here is a neutral medium through which the knowing subject perceives a sociohistorical reality that is built of the same "material" as himself. And how could knowledge of sociohistorical reality be possible if language stood in the way of our perception of reality? Social reality and the knowing subject being "coextensive," so to speak, language is derivative and cannot claim an independent status of its own. The relation between language and reality is fundamentally unproblematic—that is, a problem that can in principle be solved. Epistemology is

the department of philosophy that is supposed to solve the problem and we have no reason to doubt that it will be equal to its task.

In summary: as did so many others, Kant asked the question of how knowledge is possible and he assigned to epistemology the task of answering this question. We took a step backward here and asked, instead, how epistemology is possible, and we concluded that the shared generality of the general statement and the generalized knowing subject answered this "pre-Kantian" question. And the choice either for or against epistemology is ultimately a *political* one, since it depends on how the relation between the individual, the other, and the social order is conceived of.

3. THE ROMANTIC PARADIGM: HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The historian organizes historical essences. The data of the past are the mass that is given a form by the historian, by empathy. Because of this, history is determined by the principles of empathy and organization, and as long as these principles are not yet there, historical artifacts, in the proper sense of the word, are not possible, and we discover only the traces of incidental acts of empathy where the unguided mind has exerted its influence.¹⁰ (my translation)

This statement was made by Novalis in 1798, exactly fifty years after Hume had made the statement quoted at the beginning of the previous section. Here we have entered a new and completely different world. The historian is no longer required to *discover* and to *express* (general) knowledge, but to *organize* it. The language used by the historian is no longer seen as a passive and immutable medium but as a Proteus adapting itself to the circumstances each time an individual historian depicts or pictures part of the past.

The general statement can be seen as shorthand for an (infinite) number of singular statements which are comparable in such a way that generalization becomes possible. Whether we are concerned with theoretical, inductive, or empirical statements is of no importance in this connection. As is the case with the general statement, a great number of singular statements "go into" historical narrative. The difference is, however, that in the

10. Der Geschichtschreiber organisiert historische Wesen. Die Data der Geschichte sind die Masse, der der Geschichtschreiber Form giebt, durch Belebung. Mithin steht auch die Geschichte unter der Grundsätzen der Belebung und Organisierung überhaupt, und bevor nicht diese Grundsätze da sind, gibt es auch keine ächten historischen Kunstgebilde, sondern nichts als hier und da Spuren zufälliger Belebungen, wo unwillkürliches Genie gewaltet hat. (Novalis [F. von Hardenberg], "Blüthenstaub," in Novalis, *Werke in einem Band*, München: F. Bruckmann Verlag, 1981, 469)

I would like to thank Prof. E. H. Kossmann for drawing my attention to this aphorism.

case of a historical narrative, the number of the statements is always finite; this number can be ascertained with absolute precision and, moreover, as far as their content is concerned, the statements of a historical narrative have *no* systematic similarities. If such similarities happen to exist, this is purely coincidental. These considerations already suggest that the singular statement is a kind of intermediary between the general statement and the narrative. If the singular statement describes or refers to a recurrent state of affairs (this may be due to the way the statement is formulated), it will have more affinity with the general statement; if not, it is a natural part of a narrative. We may draw the conclusion that the really interesting contrast is not, as is ordinarily believed, the contrast between the general and the singular statement, but between the general statement and the historical narrative. Here language is used for two quite different purposes—as will be shown below. The singular statement may serve two masters and is therefore, in a certain sense, essentially incomplete or unsaturated.

So let us concentrate upon the narrative instead of upon the singular statement. We can immediately discover an interesting asymmetry between the general statement and the narrative. The general statement is a generalization of a singular statement and can be obtained from the singular statement by means of a simple formal operation. The relation between the general statement and the singular statement is a formal and deductive one. The singular statement individuates the general statement. But historical narrative, consisting of a large number of different singular statements, can only be individuated by taking each of them into account. The number of singular statements tacitly referred to by the general statement is infinite, and yet only one is sufficient for defining the general statement and vice versa. However, the number of singular statements contained within a historical narrative is finite, and yet all of them have to be considered for individuating the specific narrative told by the historian. Or: there is a reversal in the relation between the singular statement and the general statement on the one hand and historical narrative on the other; due to the similarity of the general and the singular statement, we may say that the general statement defines the singular statement, whereas the singular statement defines the identity of the historian's narrative. Apart from the *same* element of formalization present in *all* general statements—thus not characteristic of each of them—no novel element is introduced when we go from the singular statement to the general statement; however, each time language is used narratively something new and unique will be created.

However, we can also claim a parallelism in the differences between the general statement and narrative. The general statement suggests the generalized, interchangeable knowing subject, and narrative the individual historian. Being heir to Romanticism, the individual historian has been

ejected from a sociohistorical reality shared by us all: each individual historian inhabits a sociohistorical "house" different from those of his fellow historians. There will be a systematic disparity between what one historian says or thinks about sociohistorical reality and the opinions of other historians regarding it. Each attempt to define (part of) historical reality may satisfy some historians but never all of them. In other words, the link between language (i.e., narrative) and reality can never be fixed in a way acceptable to all historians, thus becoming the knowledge of a generalized knowing subject. The fact that debate and discussion have a much more prominent place in historiography than in other disciplines and that historiographical debate rarely, if ever, results in conceptions shared once and for all by all historians should not be seen as a sad deficiency of historiography that has to be remedied, but as a necessary consequence of the linguistic instruments used by the historian.

All this may be illustrated by means of typical historical concepts like *the Renaissance* or *the Cold War*. As I have pointed out elsewhere, such concepts do not refer to historical reality itself but to narrative interpretations of the past.¹¹ The term *the Renaissance* refers to a narrative interpretation and does not refer to historical reality, although the statements contained within the historian's narrative do so. It is therefore not surprising that the connotations of terms like *the Renaissance* are subject to continuous change. To require that a specific definition of *the Renaissance* should be accepted from now on by all historians would mean the immediate end of an important and interesting historiographical discussion. Therefore, words like *the Renaissance* or *the Cold War* show us that in historiography there is a systematic looseness or indeterminacy in the relation between language and reality. And this indeterminacy does not reflect some sorry state of affairs in historiography that has to be overcome at all costs, but is the condition for the very possibility of modern historiography.

To sum up once more, in historiography language is no longer a passive medium like the paperweight or a mirror, but it makes its presence felt in a way that cannot possibly be ignored. In history, language acquires a substantiality of its own; indeed—as we shall see below—historical narrative is a *thing* in the proper sense of the word. Narrative language does not have the transparency of the (social) scientist's language, but irresistibly draws the attention of the reader to itself. Due to this opacity, narrative language resembles the well-chosen word: in both cases, we can admire the linguistic instruments that have been used in speaking about reality, and in both cases the use of language has no other goal than to achieve this effect. This may also serve to justify the prominent role played by

11. F. R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*, The Hague, 1983, 169–179.

stylistic considerations in historiography. In historiography, style is not just mere adornment but touches the essence of what the historian wants to convey. Gay was correct in saying that style concerns not only the manner but also the matter of historical discourse.¹²

However, if narrative has a substantiality of its own, if it is itself a thing like the phenomena of the past described in it, no epistemological ties can be conceived of to fasten narrative to historical reality. There are no epistemological ties between things, only between things and language. We may now wonder what makes historiography still a profitable occupation—if it is one. What could a discipline without an epistemology possibly look like?

4. CONSTRUCTIVISM

It has been recognized before that historiography poses its special epistemological problems, although these were usually seen as problems *within* rather than *about* an epistemological approach to historical knowing. Oakeshott, Collingwood, and Goldstein argued that the truth of statements about the past can never be verified conclusively, since the past no longer exists. Consequently we can never compare the actual past to the statements the historian has made about it. Collingwood tried to solve the problem by saying that the historian “reenacts” the past in his own mind and thus makes the past contemporary with himself so that he can make verifiable, true statements about it.¹³

More relevant to our present purpose, however, is the way Oakeshott and Goldstein have attempted to deal with the epistemological problem.¹⁴ The idea is that the past itself can never be an ingredient in the process of acquiring historical knowledge or in historical discussion, since the past by its very nature can no longer be observed. The past no longer exists and thus cannot be a proper object of investigation. We have at our disposal only the traces the past has left us in the form of documents, inscriptions, paintings, buildings, and so forth. Consequently, all we have are *constructions* produced by historians on the basis of these traces (that is why the term *constructivism* is used for describing the position of Oakeshott and Goldstein). Even the word *reconstructivism* would be out of place since it suggests a parallelism between the past itself and the historian’s reconstruction of the past that can never be verified. So, constructivism empha-

12. P. Gay, *Style in History*, London, 1975 (see Gay’s introduction and conclusion).

13. Van der Dussen has emphasized that Collingwood’s “re-enactment” theory was born from epistemological considerations. See W. J. Van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*, The Hague, 1981, 143ff.

14. M. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, London, 1978, chap. 3. L. J. Goldstein, *Historical Knowing*, London, 1976.

sizes, as did the narrativist position sketched in the previous section, the autonomy of historiography with regard to the past itself, and that is why constructivism demands our close attention.

In order to outline the constructivist position with more precision, Goldstein distinguishes between the *infrastructure* and the *superstructure* of historical writing. The superstructure is historical narrative itself, the linguistic structures we find in history books or in articles in historical journals. The infrastructure comprises the totality of methods and techniques employed by the historian in the course of his journey from his first acquaintance with the historical documents, et cetera, to the ultimate production of the superstructure (e.g., palaeology, numismatics, chronology, etc.).¹⁵ According to Goldstein, the superstructure of historiography has not altered noticeably since the days of Thucydides, whereas all progress in historiography was due to evolutions and new developments on the level of the infrastructure. Due to these developments, progress proved possible in historiography, and when by common consent a piece of historical writing is judged to be better (or worse) than another, this can always be explained by looking at their infrastructures. It is this infrastructure, and not the correspondence with a no-longer-existing historical reality, on which decisions regarding the acceptability of the historiographical constructions produced by historians are based.

Several objections have been leveled at constructivism. Oakeshott's constructivism was criticized by Meiland on the ground that he confused "knowledge that *p*" with "evidence for *p*." Oakeshott rejected the possibility of historical knowledge, since he required of "knowing that *p*" that which is indeed true of "evidence for *p*": namely, that its object is given there and then. According to the standard analysis of "A knows that *p*,"¹⁶ however, this statement implies: 1) "A believes that *p*"; 2) "*p* is true"; and 3) "A has evidence for *p*" and this means that there is a difference between "knowing that *p*" and "having evidence that *p*."¹⁷ "Evidence that *p*" is always evidence *for* "knowing that *p*" and may therefore not be confused with it.

Most often, constructivism is attacked on the basis of the same arguments that can be used against verificationism. Verificationism is a theory concerning the meaning of statements: according to it, the meaning of the statement that *p* is equivalent to the meaning of those statements capable of verifying that *p*. It need not surprise us that the rejection of verificationism is the most obvious point of departure for a criticism of constructivism as defended by Oakeshott and Goldstein: both verificationism

15. L. J. Goldstein, *Historical Knowing*, London, 1976, chap. 5.

16. See, e.g., A. C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge*, Cambridge (Eng.), 1968, 73.

17. J. W. Meiland, *Scepticism and Historical Knowledge*, New York, 1965, 41-63.

and constructivism demonstrate a shift from the statement itself to the evidence we have for verifying the truth of the statement. A good example of the criticism of constructivism along these lines can be found in an article by P. H. Nowell-Smith.¹⁸ He accuses Goldstein of confusing the reference of a statement with its verification. The referent of a statement is the (historical) state of affairs the statement is about; the verification of the statement is the evidence we have for its truth. The difference between the two will need no amplification. If, however, reference and verification are identified, the result is the idea that historians never refer to the past itself but only to the evidence they have for verifying statements about the past. And that, in fact, is the position Goldstein wishes to defend.

However, a constructivism not of the infrastructure but of the superstructure is not subject to such criticism. In order to sustain this claim, let us first answer the question as to what such a brand of constructivism would look like. The superstructure is a linguistic construction consisting of many singular statements about the past. Each of these singular statements describes the past, so we might initially suppose that the historian's narrative is also a description of the past. This, however, is not satisfactory. Let us take two historical narratives on roughly the same topic (e.g., the French Revolution) and let us assume, furthermore, that both contain only true descriptions of this part of French history. Nevertheless, in such situations, it often happens that historians still prefer one narrative to the other. We have two options. First, we might maintain that such a preference is unfounded since both historical narratives are descriptively unexceptionable. This option is, however, in conflict with all we know about historiography and about historical discussion. According to the second option, the historian's narrative *as a whole* has a descriptive capacity of its own which we take into account when we are comparing two narratives (on, e.g., the French Revolution). But if we wish to put it this way, we must be able to make sense of the suggestion that there is some correspondence between narrative and the past: only if such a correspondence exists can we decide upon the descriptive merits of the two historical narratives. However, this idea of a correspondence between the two historical narratives and historical reality is a redundant one and does not clarify anything about how we decide upon the relative merits of the two narratives. For, the controversy between these two narratives on the French Revolution cannot be settled by simply establishing (in the way this can be done for singular statements) which one corresponds best with the past. There is not, in addition to the two historical narratives, a third thing—that is, an objective yardstick—to measure the correspondence between

18. P. H. Nowell-Smith, "The Constructionist Theory of History," *History and Theory*, Beiheft 16 (1977): 1–28.

each of the two narratives and the past itself: narratives are all we have.¹⁹ The actual past may provide us with *arguments* for preferring one historical narrative to another, but in historiographical discussion it is never *compared* with narratives *in toto* in the way we can compare reality with singular statements in order to establish their truth or falsehood. Since the actual past is only an argument and is never conclusive in settling historiographical debate, the idea of a correspondence between a historical narrative and the actual past will get us nowhere if we want to understand the narrative writing of history. At most, we could say that each historical narrative is an *attempt* or *proposal* to define, in a specific case, the correspondence between language and historical reality. But by doing so we have defined correspondence in terms of historiographical adequacy instead of explaining the latter in terms of the former (and that would have been the only compelling argument for the introduction of the notion of a correspondence between [part of] the past and the historical narrative as a whole).

To conclude, whether we see historical narrative as a conjunction of statements or as a whole, in neither case can we meaningfully speak of a correspondence between historical reality and historical narrative. Constructivism, as a theory on the autonomy of narrative with regard to the past, is right in discouraging our belief in a correspondence between historical language and reality. The previous argument shows what is right and what is wrong in constructivism. Constructivism, as it was defined by Oakeshott and by Goldstein, is a theory concerning the statements of the historian's narrative. However, in order to avoid objections like those of Meiland and of Nowell-Smith, constructivism should be interpreted as a theory on the historian's narrative *as a whole*. Goldstein's superstructure, narrative, is a linguistic construction built of many individual singular statements. Better than any other term could possibly do, the term *constructivism* reflects the fact that it is the historian's task to build these linguistic constructions whose logical characteristics cannot be reduced to those of its constituent components.

This constructivist interpretation of historiography also gives us an answer to the question of how language is used by the historian: the historian *uses* language (i.e., individual singular statements) in order to construct a narrative. In an imprecise way, we might say that singular statements are *used* to express knowledge (about the past). But this is imprecise.

19. In a similar vein, Mink writes:

the alternative is to abandon the remnant of the idea of Universal History that survives as a presupposition, namely the idea that there is a determinate historical actuality, the complex referent for all our narratives of "what actually happened," the untold story to which narrative histories approximate. (L. O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in R. H. Canary and H. Kozicki, eds., *The Writing of History*, Madison, 1978, 148.)

cise, since such statements, in fact, *are* knowledge (of the past). And nothing can be used to express what it is; what we wish to attain by means of x is different from x itself. At most, we could say that singular statements are used to express truth, for the true statement is not truth itself. Since we have accorded to historical narrative a status apart and different from that of the singular statement, we are permitted to say that according to the constructivism advocated here the historian *uses* language in the proper and true sense of the word.

5. THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN THE WRITING OF HISTORY

But, we might ask: why does historiography use language in the way claimed by constructivism? If we cannot say that historical narrative gives us a true account of the past even if all its statements are true, nor that the historian's narrative corresponds to (part of) the past, nor that there are epistemological rules that tie narrative to the past, we have every reason to be curious about how the historian's narrative nevertheless succeeds in furthering our insight into the past.

In fact, the answer to this question has already been given at the end of the previous section, when it was argued that the historian's narrative is an *attempt* or a *proposal* to define the relation between language and reality. When a historian constructs his narrative, he selects those statements he thinks to be the best guide for understanding the past: he believes his selection to be the best proposal as to how the past should be looked at. Being proposals, historical narratives do not impart cognitive knowledge (although the statements they contain have this capacity): however good my reason may be for suggesting a proposal to you, my proposal is an invitation to you to do something and not the assertion that something is the case. Proposals are neither true nor false; they do not state what reality is like (although the nature of reality will influence, or even determine, the content of our proposals). These proposals are essentially the means of *showing* historical reality. *Showing* and *proposals* are both halfway between being based upon knowledge and having or gaining knowledge. Both are more comprehensive than knowledge: showing (the past) and suggesting a proposal (as to how the past should be looked at) form a road to knowledge of the past and an indication of how to deal with it. As Novalis suggested: they *organize* our knowledge without being knowledge themselves. Similarly, we could say that Kuhn's paradigms, apart from being based upon knowledge, present a proposal as to how physical reality should be dealt with or show how this should be done, while "normal science" collects the knowledge that can be gained from the acceptance of a paradigm.

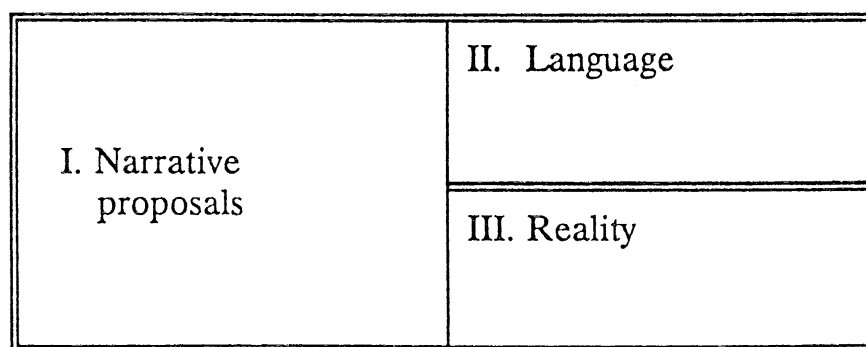
Since historical knowledge is always conditioned by these noncognitive proposals or ways of showing the past, it would be unfair to them to maintain that they are merely instrumental in gaining knowledge of the past. Inferring from the statement that *a* is instrumental in attaining *b*, that *a* is merely a means of deriving *b*, is putting secondary matters above matters of primary importance: these noncognitive proposals as to how the past should be looked at really are the backbone of the narrative writing of history. And even more significant is the fact that historians rarely, if ever, work out into great detail the cognitive implications of their proposals as to how the past should be looked at. This is not because historians are too lazy to do so. Two reasons can be given. First, working out these implications will primarily be only a more detailed specification of the proposal in question. Second, working out these implications would not bring us to a level on which intersubjectively acceptable knowledge may be expected. The memory of the proposal will never be lost. In a sense, therefore, the historian will always remain enclosed within his own historical world and that is why these historiographical proposals will have little "spin off" in the domain of cognitive knowledge. And, even more important, we might ask ourselves whether we are right in requiring of a discipline that the insight given by it should always take the form of cognitive knowledge and never of a proposal. Is not a well-considered proposal often of more use to us than the knowledge that something is the case?

These considerations may be used to explain another fact about historiography. As we have seen in section 2, cognitive knowledge requires an interchangeable knowing subject—and yet, proposals are always connected with the individuals who suggest them. A proposal that is accepted by everybody loses the property of being a proposal: it has become a rule and proposals are not rules. It is an essential part of the nature of proposals that they are not universally agreed upon, while they are nevertheless subject to rational discussion. The fact that dissension amongst historians is of a much more permanent and dramatic nature than in other disciplines should therefore neither worry nor astonish us. The affinity of narrative with the individual historian (in contrast with the general knowing subject), as stated in section 1, is also demonstrated by the narrative's property of being a proposal.

Disagreement between historians brings us to the final problem to be considered here. It has been repeatedly suggested that the fact that narrative is essentially a proposal does not rule out the possibility of rational debate. But how can this be? Ordinarily, scientific discussion seems to be worthwhile, since both participants in the debate claim to be telling us what reality is like and we are in a position to compare their claims to knowledge with reality itself. However, proposals cannot be compared to

reality itself, so what enables us to distinguish between a sensible and a foolish proposal?

In order to answer this question, we must start with the recognition of another feature of historical narrative. Narrative consists of statements. When we discuss the merits of a historical narrative, we do so by using other statements whose subject-terms refer to the narrative in question. In such discussions the historical narrative is consequently spoken about, but it never makes an appearance itself in the statements being used. Statements (of a narrative) are not part of statements. From this point of view, historical narratives are similar to the extralinguistic things we know from daily life, like chairs or houses. If we speak about a chair or a house, the words used to denote these things will appear in our language, but never these things themselves. It seems reasonable to define *things* as those entities that can be spoken about without ever being part of language themselves. It should be observed that this is a definition of the word *thing* and not a proposal for a specific ontology. A definition of the word *thing* states what will be true of things regardless of the ontology that is preferred. However, if we accept the definition given a moment ago, historical narratives are things, like chairs or houses. This is an interesting result since it indicates that, apart from language and things—ordinarily recognized as being the only categories—there is still a third category that combines characteristics of each of the former ones. We could represent this state of affairs by means of the following diagram:



The right side of the diagram (II and III) has always been central in philosophical discussion. All philosophical problems clustering around the topics of truth, reference, epistemology, and the validity of general statements should be located there. However, there are also these narrative proposals that neither refer nor correspond to reality and can only be referred to in language without ever being part of *that* language. Yet these narrative proposals are always expressed in language. They therefore cannot be reduced to category II or category III and thus deserve a place of their own in our diagram. I am not saying that categories I and II exhaust all the

possible uses we can make of language; I only wish to point out that if we investigate the narrative use of language, a distinction should be made between the categories I and II.

Furthermore, there is an important connection between the right and the left sides of the diagram. In certain cases, it may happen that the proposals we find on the left side are either generally accepted, are not recognized as such, or repeatedly take the same form. In such cases, the proposal may lose the characteristics of being a proposal and will then have become a *rule* regarding how reality should be looked at and, therefore, concerning how language should be connected with reality. And then we will have moved from the left to the right side of the diagram. An example may clarify this suggestion. Narrative interpretations of the past sometimes get a name of their own. The phrase *the Cold War* thus refers to a certain interpretation of political history from, say, 1944 to 1960 (here I am ignoring the differences between the individual interpretations proposed by historians of the period). Although reference is made to the past itself in the statements contained within such a narrative interpretation, the phrase *the Cold War* refers to such an interpretation and not to the past itself. Furthermore, let us suppose that for a long time all historians have been in agreement that this proposal as to how the past should be looked at is a reasonable one. In such a situation the question as to whether there really has been or has not been a Cold War will have become an equally silly question as the question as to whether there really has been an individual called Harry Truman who was President of the United States. A universally agreed-upon proposal has hardened into a historical phenomenon which is part of the past itself. A new convention has been adopted concerning how language should be connected with words, and from now on the phrase *the Cold War* will no longer refer to a thing on the left side but to a thing on the right side of our diagram.²⁰

This argument has two important implications. First, it suggests that modern Anglo-Saxon philosophy of language has always too easily taken for granted what (types of) things we believe to exist: one is rarely interested in the question as to what makes us prefer to recognize one thing or (type of) thing above some other set. Foucault was right when he pointed out that our inventory of reality may change drastically in time, since the question as to what things reality contains is subject to rational debate, and that it is an important task of philosophy to clarify the nature of such debates.²¹ What (types of) things we believe to make up the inventory of reality is always the result of an essentially *historical* interpretation of reality

20. For a more detailed exposition, see F. R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 155–169.

21. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, 1973, xv–xxiv.

and never a mere given. Science tells us about the properties of things; history gives our perceptions the cohesion necessary for recognizing (types of) things. The separation of language and reality (the right side of the diagram) and the recognition of certain (types of) things in reality are the result and the final stage of a historical perception of reality. But as long as we use the historian's language, no clear separation between language and reality is possible, since language still contains terms like *the Cold War* which have characteristics of both. This probably explains the curious tendency of so many historians and philosophers of history to attribute to language what is true of reality and vice versa.²²

The other implication is this: In section 1 we associated the recognition of the historical character of reality with Hegel's claim that much in history cannot be reduced to intentional human action. The previous discussion demonstrates that we should not interpret Hegel's claim as a theory concerning what (historical) reality contains. It is not so that, in addition to the intentional human actions, the past *also* contains the unintentional results of intentional human action—the kind of things the Enlightenment failed to see. On the contrary, Hegel's claim should be seen as a theory on (historical) language. Language may be used for speaking about intentional human action (here language corresponds to reality in a relatively unproblematic way). Furthermore, language may be used for speaking about these unintentional results of intentional human action. However, in this case language is no longer used for *describing* the past but for *interpreting* it. The things referred to within this use of language are not part of the past but of a "narrativist universe." Consequently, the secession of the Romantic individual (i.e., the modern historian) from the social order (of the Enlightenment) does not mean that historians have now hit upon a hitherto neglected part of historical reality that will, however, always remain an inscrutable secret to them. The issue is not the discovery of a new part of the past but of a new dimension to the use of (historiographical) language. It reflects the discovery of the dimension of historical debate concerning proposals done by historians with regard to how the past should be looked at. It is true that knowledge acceptable to all historians cannot be found here—and this explains how the gap between the Romantic individual and the social order came into existence. However, the dramatic and menacing implications of this view of the unbridgeable gap between the Romantic individual and the social order he thinks about will vanish if we are aware of the nature and the consequences of

22. A good example is C. L. Becker, "What Are Historical Facts," in H. Meyerhoff, ed., *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, New York, 1959. In this article, facts and the interpretation of facts are identified with one another.

this new way of speaking about sociohistorical reality resulting from this new dimension of language: it has simply created the "logical space" that makes historical discussion and historical debate possible.

But discussion and debate assume that we possess criteria for deciding who is right and who is wrong. What could be the purpose of discussion if the proposals that are discussed were to prove to be completely arbitrary? As the reader will remember, this was the problem that initiated our exposition of the fact that narrative proposals are things. It is a property of things to possess a certain unity and cohesion; if a thing does not have these properties it would not be a thing but a mere aggregate. Thus, just like ordinary things, historical narratives should have as much unity and cohesion as possible. We have divided reality into (types of) things which have a maximum of unity and cohesion (and we can meaningfully discuss the degree of success we have had in the enterprise); similarly, the narrativist things created by the historian in the narrativist universe should have this maximum of unity and cohesion. This explains why historians and philosophers of history, especially those in the tradition of German historicism since Ranke,²³ have always required that the historian bring out the unity and the cohesion of those different aspects or parts of the past investigated by him. The only objection one might formulate against this historian suggestion is that this unity and this cohesion do not lie in the past itself and thus cannot be "discovered" by the historian as if they had always been there. The historian *gives* this unity and cohesion to the past by means of his narrative proposal as to how the past should be looked at. Unity and cohesion are not properties of the past but of the historical narrative that is proposed for the interpretation of the past.

The relative merits of historical narratives are therefore ascertained by an assessment of their unity and internal coherence. But, we might ask next, where do we find this unity and coherence? In this connection we should distinguish between two ways of looking at the historian's narrative: 1) narrative seen as a conjunction of separate, singular statements; and 2) narrative considered in its totality. At first sight, it might seem obvious that the first way of looking at the historian's narrative will be most successful in discovering narrative's unity and coherence. It is certainly true that the statements of historical narrative should be mutually connected in a coherent and intelligible way. If a historical narrative rambles on from one subject to another and its statements are jumbled together in an unpredictable way, we are certainly justified in calling such a narrative

23. Historism should not be confused with historicism. Since K. R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London, 1957, the term *historicism* is ordinarily reserved for referring to speculative philosophies of history. See the introduction in this volume, note 11.

incoherent. However, this kind of (in)coherence is not typical of narratives (historical or not): anyone who writes a mathematical treatise, a sermon, a novel, a libretto, et cetera, has to satisfy the requirement of a coherent use of language. So let us consider the second approach. If we want to discuss the problem of the unity and the coherence of a narrative as a whole, we must first of all be able to *identify* the proposal, made in the narrative in question which states how the past should be looked at. We have seen that historical narrative is essentially a proposal, so narrative coherence can only be discussed if we know how to find out about the nature of the proposals in question. The difficulty is that the nature of these proposals only becomes clear in contrast with other such proposals. If we have only one narrative on, for example, the French Revolution, we will be unable to ascertain what proposal is made in it as to how one should look at the French Revolution. In such a case we might even forget that this narrative embodies a proposal at all and come to see it as a reflection of the actual past in the way suggested by the Enlightenment paradigm. These proposals are always *ways of seeing* the past, and if there is only one way given to us of seeing the past, this will easily change into a conviction with regard to how the past *really has been*.

The degree of unity and coherence of narrative is therefore always a relative affair: we can only come to conclusions regarding it by comparing the narrative in question with others on the same or a closely related subject. Therefore, narrative unity and coherence always come "from the outside," as it were: they do not have their source so much in narrative itself—at least not exclusively so—as in what happens in the controversy concerning several narratives on the same topic. That is, of course, in accordance with the previous claim that historical insight should not be seen as cognitive knowledge, in the proper sense of the word, but rather as a stage in a continuing debate. Consequently, there is no criterion outside the narrative presentation of the past that enables us to establish, in some "narrative-independent" way, a historical narrative's unity and coherence. The past itself will provide us with arguments in these historiographical debates but it is never the past itself that will be decisive.

Lastly, this ultimate appeal to historiographical debate means that our philosophical investigation of the narrative writing of history must come to an end here. It is not the task of the philosopher of history but of historians to formulate either implicitly or explicitly general rules concerning which considerations should be decisive in historiographical discussion. The philosopher of history is only permitted to say that unity and coherence form the formal criterion for the assessment of the relative merits of historical narratives, but what material content should be given to this formal criterion is for historians to decide.

6. CONCLUSION

Let us summarize. We saw that the Romantic conception of the place of the individual (historian) in, or rather outside, the social order was the necessary condition for a veritable recognition of the unfathomable and fascinating secrets of the past. Since then, the strangeness of the past has been the condition for our self-knowledge as inheritors of a long historical evolution. Paradoxically, strangeness is the only mirror in which we can recognize ourselves. The more we make the world (e.g., the past) outside us strange, alien, and impenetrable, the fuller our insight into ourselves will become. This insight that an estrangement from reality is the price we must pay for self-knowledge was, I believe, one of the principal sources of Romantic despair (for the Enlightenment, self-knowledge was the condition for an optimistic belief in the *integration* of the individual into society). Modern historiography has drawn its inspiration from this source.

Translated into terms of the linguistic instruments we have at our disposal for conveying knowledge of reality, the victory of Romanticism over Enlightened natural-law philosophy means a shift from the general statement to historical narrative. There is an asymmetry in the relation between the general statement and narrative. The general statement (like the singular statement) is, or expresses, knowledge which in narrative is only *used* for gaining insight. Historical insight has no cognitive character but is essentially a proposal as to how the past should be looked at. It is not knowledge but an *organization* of knowledge.

What is so interesting about the narrative use of language is the fact that here the relation between language and reality is systematically destabilized; narrative language can upset this balance between language and reality since it has an autonomy of its own. Narrative language has freed itself from its ties to (historical) reality and has thus built itself a platform from which it can function as an arbiter in the debate regarding how language and reality should be related to one another. The certainties of epistemological rules have given way to the openness of historiographical debate. This is so interesting because one of the most conspicuous features of the present philosophy of science is a similar tendency to widen the gap between language and reality. When Kuhn uses the term *incommensurable*, he wants to emphasize that in certain phases in the evolution of science, physical reality itself cannot be appealed to in order to define the nature of the disagreement between scientists. In such situations "historical" language is the only recourse we have; hence Rorty's abandonment of epistemology in favor of a hermeneutics inspired by Gadamer.²⁴

24. R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Oxford, 1980, part 3. See also R. J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Oxford, 1983.

The situation in which science finds itself under such circumstances is endemic in historiography. Historical narrative and the historian's use of language are therefore not only of interest to historians and philosophers of history but to philosophers of language in general. One of the most fascinating facts about language is that it not only expresses knowledge but can also be *used* (in the true sense of the word) for the construction of linguistic entities that are both language and things. And these linguistic entities are the matrices for the generation of new knowledge.

FOUR

Historical Representation

1. EXPLANATION, INTERPRETATION, AND REPRESENTATION

We like to think of philosophy of science and philosophy of history as pure and strictly rational disciplines that have no substantial presuppositions themselves. This gives them the right, so we say, to investigate the “presuppositions” of science and history. Of course, everybody is aware that this picture is overly optimistic. Like every other *discours*, to use Foucault’s term, philosophy of science and philosophy of history do have their essentialist presuppositions too—essentialist presuppositions as to what the essential problems are in science and history from a philosophical point of view. As Foucault and Hegel never tired of pointing out, these presuppositions can be discovered by locating the boundary between what can and what cannot be said within a given *discours*.¹ That is why it makes sense to say that the presuppositions of a *discours* should not primarily be associated with its undiscussed premises or ultimate foundations, but rather with what it excludes, in the way a taboo excludes certain ways of speaking.

The best way to ascertain the presuppositions of a *discours* is to study its terminology.² The semantic inventory of a *discours* by necessity determines this boundary between what can and what cannot be said, discussed, or investigated within a *discours*. Vocabulary and terminology therefore express

1. The idea is, of course, central to Hegel’s conception of dialectics. With regard to Foucault’s relevant views, see M. Foucault, *L’ordre du discours: Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*, Paris, 1971.

2. The implications of this proposal for the writing of intellectual history are brilliantly demonstrated in J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*, New York, 1973.

what is supposed to be essential in that which is under discussion. For example, because of their different vocabularies, the debate between the logical-positivists and Popper on the one hand and the Kuhnians on the other was not primarily a debate about the growth of knowledge (as the participants in the debate themselves thought), but in fact a debate about what should be seen as essential in the scientific enterprise. According to the former kind of debate, this essence is the verification (logical-positivism) or the falsification (Popper and his disciples) of scientific hypotheses; according to the latter kind of debate, what is essential is the nature of scientific rhetoric (that is, how scientists debate with one another and what kind of arguments they generally consider to be decisive).

The same is true of philosophy of history. In its initial phase, modern philosophy of history since, say, the 1940s, has almost exclusively used the vocabulary of description and explanation. The essentialist presupposition involved was, of course, that essentially the past is a sea of historical phenomena that have to be described and explained. The past was conceived of as a host of phenomena lying before the historian, waiting to be described and explained. The preference for this vocabulary automatically generated a number of questions, which were mostly epistemological, concerning the truth of descriptive and explanatory statements made by the historian about the past. Thus, the covering-law model (CLM) came to dominate the debate in modern philosophy of history in the first half of the CLM's short life for no other reason than that the vocabulary adopted by philosophers of history suggested that historical explanation and description were the essence of the historian's task.

However, in the 1970s a new vocabulary came into use. Both hermeneuticists and narrativists believed that the historian's task was not the *explanation* but the *interpretation* of the past. Indeed, this was more a matter of belief implicit in the turn the debate took somewhere around 1970 than of explicit argument. Moreover, the spell exercised by the previous vocabulary proved so strong that it brought about a split in hermeneutic philosophy of history. The protagonists of what Von Wright and Olafson have called *analytical hermeneutics*³—roughly, the tradition we associate with Collingwood, Dray, or Von Wright—had become so used to speaking the language of explanation that a hybrid form of hermeneutics came into being—hybrid, because it combined the traditional concentration of hermeneutics on the interpretation of meaning with the requirement that the historian explain the past presupposed by the CLM's vocabulary. Many of the weaknesses of analytical hermeneutics can be traced back to its original sin of mixing the questions suggested by the hermeneutic vocabulary with the explanatory ideal of the other vocabulary.

3. See F. A. Olafson, "Hermeneutics: 'Analytical' and 'Dialectical,'" *History and Theory*, *Beiheft* 25 (1986): 28–42.

The undiluted vocabulary of hermeneutics only made its way slowly into philosophy of history, insofar as it did so at all. Literary criticism and the relevant domains of philosophy of language have shown themselves to be much more receptive to the new vocabulary than philosophy of history. This is not without its dangers for philosophy of history. For, in philosophy, consistency is always to be preferred to hybridization, and it is therefore to be feared that philosophy of history will lose ground to its more vigilant rivals. Traditionally, hermeneutic theory is a theory concerning the way in which meaning is interpreted. The essentialist presupposition of hermeneutic theory is therefore that the past essentially is a meaningful whole and that it is the task of the historian to interpret the meaning of historical phenomena. The epistemological questions that so obsessed philosophy of history in its initial phase then lost much of their urgency, since questions of meaning are concerned with the relation of words to words rather than with the relation of words to things. And the once hotly debated issue of whether history was an (applied) science was abandoned in favor of the more existential problems of the relation between text and reader raised by the work of influential authors like Gadamer and Derrida.⁴ Exchanging the vocabulary of description and explanation for that of meaning and interpretation implied new tasks for philosophy of history, and everyone will agree that there is a great deal of important work still to be done in this direction. It will take some time before philosophy of history has really caught up with literary criticism.

Still, despite the new insights that may be expected from the development of a truly hermeneutic philosophy of history, we should not lose sight of the fact that the vocabulary of meaning and interpretation also has its disadvantages. The terms *meaning* and *interpretation* can be used in a relatively straightforward way when we are speaking of: 1) the interpretation of the meaning of human actions (the favorite domain of analytical hermeneutics); and 2) the interpretation of texts (the favorite domain of continental hermeneutics). Nobody will want to dispute the fact that historians often have to answer the question of why historical agents in the past performed certain actions or what the meaning was of a text written by Hobbes or Rousseau. The trouble is, however, that there is a great deal in the past that does not have a meaning in either of these senses. Twentieth-century historiography prefers to see the past from a point of view different from that of the historical agents themselves and this reduces the intention of analytical hermeneutics to a futile enterprise.⁵ Moreover, the contemporary variant of intellectual history, the history of mentalities, is not so much interested in meanings (either the *mens auctoris* or meaning as appropriated by *us*) as it is in the mentalities of which the

4. See chapter 2.

5. See chapter 3.

text is evidence. And a mentality may be a background for meaning, but is not meaning itself.

From these developments in twentieth-century historiography, we can conclude that meaning is less ubiquitous in the past investigated by the historian than hermeneutics suggests. Although the past consists of what human agents did, thought, or wrote in the past, and the past knows no superhuman agents, the historian's perspective often both creates and investigates a past that is devoid of intrinsic meaning. The Hegelian insight into the unintended consequences of intentional human action is paradigmatic for this perspective.

Two strategies suggest themselves if an attempt is to be made to save the vocabulary of meaning and interpretation. First, one could have recourse to speculative philosophies of history. Speculative philosophies have always assumed that there is a hidden meaning in the historical process, even if the historical agents themselves are or were unaware of it. As actions have a meaning because they are performed in order to achieve a certain goal, the historical process in its totality is the means of achieving a certain goal, be it the Absolute Mind or the classless society. Following this strategy only makes sense, of course, on the assumption that speculative systems are legitimate ways of dealing with the past. Two questions have to be considered in this connection. In the first place, there is the question as to whether speculative systems are acceptable from historical and philosophical points of view. As is well known, authors like Popper, Von Hayek, and Mandelbaum did not think so, but recently there is considerably more tolerance toward speculative systems than previously. Let us, therefore, suspend our judgment on that point. All the more important is thus the second question. Assuming the acceptability of speculative systems, can we credit them with having discovered the meaning of history? It might be objected that using the term *meaning* with regard to the historical process as interpreted by speculative systems is an unwarranted personification of the historical process: we use the term only when *people* do something in order to achieve something else. An even more serious obstacle standing in the way of our talking about the "meaning of the historical process" is the fact that even "ordinary" historiography cannot be said to *discover* the (hidden) meaning of history; at most one can say that historians *give* a meaning to the past. Thus Munz wrote in a vein curiously reminiscent of Derrida: "for the truth of the matter is that there is no ascertainable face behind the various masks every story-teller, be he a historian, poet, novelist or mythmaker, is creating":⁶ the past has no face and the masks made by historians are all we have. Thus, as soon as we leave the sphere of intentional human action, the past has no intrinsic meaning, hidden or other-

6. P. Munz, *The Shapes of Time*, Middletown, 1978, 16–17.

wise; and it is decidedly odd to talk about interpreting the meaning of something which has no intrinsic meaning.

Odd, yes, but impossible? Suppose we are confronted with a collection of words arbitrarily jumbled together so that we can be sure that the collection itself has no meaning. Nevertheless, Stanley Fish would probably say that we would be able to interpret the "meaning" of even this "text"⁷—in the way we can see a ship in a cloud. He might argue that there is no good reason to adhere to an object-bound meaning of meaning: to do so is to engage in metaphysical antics. There is meaning as soon as readers read texts or what they decide to *see* as texts. In short, meaning should be associated with a certain *practice*; the practice of interpretation—regardless of what is interpreted—has or does not have intrinsic meaning (the latter disjunction even is imaginary). However, it is precisely this reliance on practice which speaks strongly against such extreme tolerance with regard to the meaning of meaning and interpretation. For, what restraints could be imposed on this practice of giving meaning? Supposing we start ascribing intentions to physical objects, what considerations would be able to guide us in discussions about these intentions? (The fact that we are *not* empty-handed in discussions about what is intrinsically meaningless in the past is not an argument against this view. On the contrary: this fact proves that a role is played by another factor whose existence was obscured by the vocabulary of meaning; and interpretation for *this* vocabulary cannot explain why we are *not* empty-handed in such discussions.)

Let us now turn to the second strategy for neutralizing the argument that the past has no intrinsic meaning. I am referring to the strategy adopted by, for instance, Hayden White and Ricoeur when they claim that the past is like a text and thus has, like the text, a meaning of its own. Whether White and Ricoeur want us to take the statement "the past is a text" in the literal sense or only metaphorically is not always clear from their writings. But in whatever way the claim is formulated,⁸ a simple objection can be made to this strategy. If texts are really meaningful texts (and if they are not, they offer White and Ricoeur no consolation) they are always about something outside the text itself. (I shall ignore the problem posed by fictional texts which clearly have no bearing upon this discussion.) We may wonder, then, what the text that the past is could possibly be about. And our inability to answer this question speaks strongly against White's and Ricoeur's proposal to see the past as a text.

7. S. Fish, "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One," in Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, Cambridge (MA), 1980.

8. H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, 1973, 30; P. Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Actions Considered as a Text," in P. Rabinow and W. M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science*, Berkeley, 1979.

Hence, the vocabulary of description and explanation and that of meaning and interpretation both have their inadequacies. They tend to focus the attention of the philosopher of history on what is of relatively little significance in modern historiography. That is why I now propose a third vocabulary: that of representation. It is often said in common parlance that the historian *represents* the past (instead of describing or interpreting it). The vocabulary of representation has the advantage of not being suggestive of the kind of presuppositions the other two vocabularies gave rise to. The suggestion is rather that the historian could meaningfully be compared to the painter representing a landscape, a person, and so on. The implication is, obviously, a plea for a *rapprochement* between philosophy of history and aesthetics.

2. WHY REPRESENTATION?

Unlike the vocabulary of description and explanation, the vocabulary of representation has the capacity to account not only for the details of the past but also for the way these details have been integrated within the totality of the historical narrative. The predilection of the covering-law model tradition and of analytical hermeneutics for the details of the historical narrative has been observed by many commentators and needs no elucidation; when we speak, on the other hand, of historical representations, we naturally think of complete historical narratives. More interestingly, the vocabulary of representation, unlike the vocabulary of interpretation, does not require that the past itself have a meaning. Representation is indifferent to meaning. Yet the historical text itself *does* have a meaning. It follows that the vocabulary of representation can help us to explain the coming into being of meaning out of what does *not yet* have meaning. Meaning is originally representational and arises from our recognition of how other people (historians, painters, novelists) represent the world. It requires us to look at the world through the eyes of others—or, at least, to recognize that this can be done. Meaning has two components: the world, and the insight that it can be represented in a certain way, that it can be seen from a certain point of view. We must therefore disagree with the hierarchical order of representation and hermeneutics proposed by Gadamer when he writes that “aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics.”⁹ The reverse is in fact true: aesthetics, as the philosophy of representation, precedes that of interpretation and is the basis for explaining interpretation. On the other hand, we can agree with Gadamer, in that the gap between the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the *Naturwissen-*

9. H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming, New York, 1986, 147.

schaften is primarily existential rather than methodological in nature; for it was representation that brought our expulsion from the natural world, and meaning was given to us in return for the paradise we thus lost. The sciences and hermeneutics are situated on opposite sides of the dividing line embodied in representation.

If, then, the sciences are closer to representation than to the interpretation of meaning, it will be necessary to point out the differences between the sciences and representation. Scientific theories are not representations of the world: they allow us to formulate statements expressing states of affairs that have never been realized in the actual world. Representation, on the other hand, is only concerned with the world as it *is* or *was*. Scientific statements have a model or hypothetical character (with the form: *if . . . then . . .*); representation is categorical.

A difficulty arises at this point. If we think of fiction and paintings of fictional landscape, it may look as if artistic representation, like science, has no less the capacity to represent that which has never been realized, nor will ever be realized in the actual world. Goodman has dealt with this difficulty in his characteristically effective way. What, for example, does a picture of Pickwick or a picture of a unicorn represent? Goodman's answer to this question is essentially concerned with the logic of the term *representation*. The term should be understood in such a way that the phrase "*a* represents *b*" does not imply anything with regard to the existence of *b*. And this can be achieved if phrases like "a picture representing Pickwick" or "representing a unicorn" are seen "as unbreakable one-place predicates, or class-terms like 'desk' and 'table.'" We cannot reach inside any of them and quantify over parts of them."¹⁰ In this way, representation in fiction does not commit us to the existence of what is represented, nor even to its existence being possible. Moreover, I have demonstrated elsewhere that we can conceive of fiction as representing states of affairs, the possibility of whose existence is not only ruled out by the physical laws known to us but even by logical rules.¹¹ And take the drawings of Escher. Surely these drawings are representations—they are *about* something (for example, a logical inconsistency)—but what they are about could never be realized in (historical) reality. The curious problem with these drawings is rather *what* we understand when we think we understand them: Do we understand the drawing or do we understand why we do not understand the drawing? Can we understand or do we only recognize a logical inconsistency? In any case, we can be sure that there is no symmetry between the hypothetical statements made by the scientist and representation in fiction.

10. N. Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis, 1985, 21–22.

11. F. R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*, The Hague, 1983, 199.

Goodman's suggestion that his unbreakable one-place predicates weaken the link between reality (or what it might possibly be like) and representation raises the question of how representation and epistemology are related. At first sight we might feel that representation is undeniably a way of speaking about reality and therefore of professional interest to the epistemologist. On the other hand, if the term can still be used legitimately with regard to drawings of Pickwick, unicorns, or of Escher's perspectivist paradoxes, it begins to look as if representation and epistemology are at right angles to each other. With regard to this problem, however, Goodman makes a useful distinction. He states that the phrase "*a* represents *b*" is ambiguous, meaning: 1) what the picture in question is about; or 2) the *kind* of picture that is indicated by the phrase (the picture may be a "Pickwick picture" or a "unicorn picture").¹² The second meaning of the phrase takes care of the Pickwick and unicorn drawings. That leaves us with the first meaning and, since *being about* does raise epistemological questions, the relevance of epistemology for representation seems fairly obvious.

Yet this conclusion would be too rash. This becomes clear if we remember Rorty's views on the history of epistemology. Rorty demonstrated that epistemology only came into being as the result of Descartes's postulate of a *forum internum* "in which bodily and perceptual sensations . . . and all the rest of what we now call 'mental' were objects of quasi-observations."¹³ Within the Aristotelian tradition previous to Descartes, there was only the world and the intellect grasping truths about the world. The gap created by Descartes between our "inner eye" and reality—the inner eye can only observe the representation of reality in the *forum internum*—would have to be closed up again in some way or another if one wanted to account for the possibility of knowledge of the world; and to epistemology was assigned the task of doing so. A parallelism was thus suggested between epistemology and representation: epistemology describes how reality is represented in the mind of the transcendental ego. Aesthetic theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with their tendency to equate pictorial representation with sensory perception, reinforced this parallelism further.

The difficulty is, however, that the phrase "*a* represents *b*" is indeterminate with regard to the relation between *a* and *b*, to a degree that could never be tolerated within even the most liberal of epistemologies. A circle may represent the sun, a coin, a city on the map, and so on. As we all know, representation is subject to context and tradition—perhaps even to simple agreement—which would certainly be an absurd claim in the case

12. Goodman, *Languages*, 22.

13. R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Oxford, 1980, 50.

of epistemology. In this respect, representation calls to mind the way Rorty described the pre-Cartesian situation before the introduction of the ahistorical sheet of the universal, transcendental ego, onto which the indubitable truths were projected. Within the earlier view, knowledge was an attribute of the human individual, rather than a representation on the *im*-personal sheet of the transcendental ego. Consequently, all knowledge was closely connected with the historical contingencies of the world and of the human individuals living in it; the conception of a body of eternal, context-independent truths, to be contemplated in our inner selves, would have been incomprehensible. The pre-Cartesian, Aristotelian view of knowledge is, therefore, much closer to representation than to what we have understood by knowledge since the victory of the Cartesian, epistemological view of knowledge.

Moreover, philosophy as a way of thinking has a built-in tendency we cannot afford to disregard in this connection. Philosophy has always had a perennial inclination to generalize about the topics being discussed. If what the epistemologist has to say about the transcendental ego were not applicable to *each* individual, he or she would be engaged in either speculative science or bad philosophy—or even both. The psychologist does *not* need to maintain that the faculties of perception he or she investigates are exactly alike for all individuals, but the entities *created* or *postulated* by the epistemologist require absolute generality, precisely because they are not *found* and therefore are not subject to the contingencies of the real world. In this way, philosophy is the most democratic of all disciplines. However, these universalist pretensions of epistemology prevent its coming to terms with the indeterminacy of representation, which, as is demonstrated by the history of art, is one of its most conspicuous features. Accordingly, we could see epistemology as the attempt to codify a certain form or forms of representation. Epistemology is representation without history and without the representational varieties which gradually developed in the history of representation. There is, therefore, a natural coalition between history and representation and a natural enmity between this coalition and epistemology. When history is eliminated and representation codified, they both cease to exist and epistemology makes its appearance in their place.

This recognition of the nature of the relation between epistemology and representation allows us to see what is not correct in the claim made by both idealist aestheticians and by Goodman that art is a form of cognition: "Truth and its aesthetic counterpart amount to appropriateness under different names."¹⁴ We can, to a certain extent, agree with this claim, but it should be qualified. The relation between scientific truth and its

14. Goodman, *Languages*, 264.

aesthetic counterpart runs parallel to that between epistemology and representation. Science is codified representation, and epistemology investigates the nature and the foundation of the codification process. The insights of artistic representation are broader and deeper (because it is uncoded) than those of science (though both will prefer their favorite domain).

And considerations such as these also have their implications for the problem of relativism in history (and art). Relativism as a philosophical problem arises when historical changes are observed in our codified, scientific views of the world. Relativism therefore has its origin in the line of fracture between epistemology and representation. This state of affairs entails that relativism cannot be a problem in art and history: both are safely situated on the representation side of that line of fracture. But, it might be objected, have not art and history also had their changes in representation? However, *these* historical changes are changes in style and have *no* epistemological implications. Different scientific traditions give rise to the epistemologist's nightmare of relativism; different styles in history and art are different ways of representing (historical) reality. And since the terms *a* and *b* in the phrase "*a* represents *b*" give rise to exactly the same epistemological problems, representation is indifferent to epistemology. Consequently, stylistic change in art and history is free from relativist implications. However, when artists or historians begin to see themselves as scientists and want their representational insights to be codified, they will be caught in the webs of relativism. Yet, relativism *is* a problem for science, since science and its history (the source of most relativist worries) are situated on different sides of the line of fracture mentioned above. I therefore disagree with Bernstein's too-easy solution for relativism with regard to science when he writes: "relativism ultimately makes sense (and gains its plausibility) as the dialectical antithesis to objectivism. If we see through objectivism, if we expose what is wrong with this way of thinking, then we are at the same time questioning the very intelligibility of relativism."¹⁵ By requiring us to "see through objectivism"—which is Bernstein's label for epistemology—Bernstein's strategy amounts to transferring science to the same side as representation. As we have seen in the previous paragraph, this cannot be done.

We can summarize as follows: The vocabulary of representation, when used for speaking about the writing of history, is free from the less fortunate presuppositions associated with the vocabularies of explanation and interpretation. It will therefore be worthwhile to analyze the writing of history in terms of representation. Such an analysis can be expected to have wider implications, since it could teach us something about the possibili-

15. R. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Oxford, 1984, 166–167.

ties and limitations of epistemology. The inestimable positive achievement of epistemology has been to create in the transcendental ego the indispensable platform that is a prerequisite for all science. Its limitation, however, has been that in attributing all cognitive primacy to the transcendental ego it has effected the melting away of both reality itself and the representation of reality in art and in history. Epistemology has thus created the unpleasant dilemma of having to choose between a realistic and an idealistic interpretation of scientific knowledge. Moreover, the representation of reality by the individual cognitive subject that is not reducible to a transcendental ego has since then been seen as a doubtful enterprise from a cognitive point of view.

3. REPRESENTATION IN ART AND HISTORY

If a comparison of art and history is the issue, it could easily be thought that history and the history of an art ought to be compared. There is, however, an asymmetry between history *tout court* and the history of art. Like the painter, the historian represents (historical) reality by giving it a meaning, through the meaning of his text, that reality does not have of itself; the art historian, however, studies the meaningful representations of reality created by the artist. In history there is often, though not always, a *dehors texte* (which Derrida would like to exclude completely), whereas Derrida's statement "il n'y pas dehors texte" *does* make sense with regard to the history of art or literary criticism. Rather, the art historian is on a par with the historian of historiography—both generally avoid the domain between meaning and that which has no meaning. In order to avoid confusion, both—the history of art and the history of historiography—can better be called *criticism*.

I propose, therefore, to see the writing of history from the point of view of aesthetics. Although never very popular, this is of course a familiar move in the history of philosophy of history. Quintilianus said that "historia est proxima poesis et quodammodo carmen solutum" (history comes closest to poetry and is, so to speak, a poem in prose), a statement that was echoed some eighteen hundred years later by Ranke—without, however, the latter being very specific about where this poetic nature of historiography was to be found.¹⁶ More explicit was Nietzsche when he required of the historian "eine grosse künstlerische Potenz, ein schaffendes Darüberschweben, ein liebendes Versenktsein in die empirische Data, ein Weiterdichten an gegebenen Typen" (a great artistic talent, a creative independence, a loving of losing oneself in empirical data, a poeticization of what

16. F. R. Ankersmit, "De chiastische verhouding tussen literatuur en geschiedenis," *Spektator* 16 (1987): 91–106.

is given); in short: *das Künstlerauge*.¹⁷ But the customary point of departure for a *rapprochement* between aesthetics and history in Croce's well-known essay "La storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell'arte" of 1890. As Hayden White has pointed out, the substance of Croce's argument in this early essay was somewhat less spectacular than Croce himself and his contemporaries liked to believe. At the end of the last century, philosophers of history like Windelband and Rickert argued that the sciences are nomothetical and the *Geisteswissenschaften* idiographic. In fact, in his essay, Croce merely substituted the term *art* for *idiographic science* without changing the structure of the argument of his neo-Kantian predecessors.¹⁸ History should be subsumed under the concept of art since both represent the particular as such.

If we try to derive a theory of representation from Croce's views, this theory will amount to the thesis that both history and art represent the particular, whereas science subsumes the particular under general laws. At first sight this seems to be a reasonable proposal: paintings always represent individual states of affairs. But it could be objected that we are falling victim to artistic Philistinism here. Thus Danto discusses two paintings representing respectively Newton's first and third laws.¹⁹ Both paintings, showing a single horizontal line on the canvas, happen to be exactly alike, but that need not concern us here. If Danto's example is accepted, it contradicts Croce's intuitions about the distinction between art and science. For, Danto's pictures represent laws of nature and not some (historical) state of affairs. Nevertheless, Croce could save his position by replying that Danto's pictures represent *the fact* that in our universe objects happen to behave in conformity with the laws in question. However, this reply has the undesirable consequence of once again obliterating the distinction Croce wanted to justify.

But surely Danto's examples are somewhat exotic. Let us therefore grant Croce that most paintings are representations of landscapes, still lifes, sea battles, the Duke of Wellington, and so on. Croce is no doubt correct in claiming that such paintings represent particulars as such and in this respect differ from the way in which the scientist describes the world. But even then I wonder whether Croce's views will be of much help in understanding representation. More specifically, it should be noted that Croce's views do not concern representation *as such* but only the nature of *what* is represented (that is, individual states of affairs). It is as if we were trying to define automobiles in terms of the loads they can carry.

17. F. Nietzsche, *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben* [1874], Stuttgart, 1970, 61.

18. White, *Metahistory*, 383.

19. A. C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Cambridge (MA), 1983, 120–121.

A similar tendency to avoid representation itself and to focus on a more subsidiary problem can be detected in Goodman's influential theory about representation. Right at the beginning of his book, Goodman boldly declares that "denotation is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance."²⁰ With regard to the latter part of this claim, Goodman demonstrates that representation does not entail resemblance. Nothing resembles x more than x itself, yet we do not say that x represents itself. Moreover, pictures always resemble each other more than what they represent. That leaves us with the former part of the claim, the claim that a picture, "to represent an object, must be a symbol for it, stand for it, refer to it."²¹ Since Goodman offers no argument to support his claim, it is difficult to say whether we should see it as a view subject to rational debate or as a sort of stipulatory definition. In any case, in whatever way we read the claim that representation essentially is denotation, it makes us wonder in what way representation differs from all the other devices we have at our disposal to denote something. So the claim has to be amplified. Resemblance having been ruled out, we might consider the requirement of realism. Hence, a is a representation of b if: 1) a denotes b ; and 2) a satisfies the requirements of realism. But what the realist requires in one age or culture may be incomprehensible in another. Goodman concludes: "Realism is relative, determined by the system of representation standard for a given culture or person at a given time";²² "realism is a matter not of any constant or absolute relationship between a picture and its object but of a relationship between the system of representation employed in the picture and the standard system."²³

How true, we might feel like exclaiming, but how disappointing! All we have now is that a represents b if: 1) a denotes b ; and 2) the nature of a as a representation of b is entirely a matter of convention, which is, of course, a sophisticated way of saying nothing. Thus, in a way reminiscent of Croce, Goodman also attempts to avoid addressing the question of what representation is. And, as we saw in Croce's case, the result is that representation becomes the vaguest of notions, so that anything can be the representation of anything else. For Goodman a representation is a mere symbol for what it represents, in the way a name may refer to anything we wish it to refer to. He therefore likes to speak of art, once again like Croce, as a kind of language. Both ascribe to art a cognitive capacity because, like language, it is a system of symbols capable of conveying meaning. Art becomes a kind of pictography in which the meaning of the symbols is determined by convention. But precisely for that reason nobody would call

20. Goodman, *Languages*, 5.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 37.

23. Ibid., 38.

pictography art; moreover, the meaning of the work of art is expressed *in* it (it attracts our attention to itself in a way linguistic symbols never do) and not *by* it (as we read the symbols of a rebus or a pictographic text).

But even the substance of Goodman's theory—representation is denotation—is unconvincing. Let us take an ideal example of representation. If we see a representation of Napoleon at Madame Tussaud's, there is something odd about the assertion that this representation "denotes" Napoleon. If that were all it did, we might wonder why the staff of Madame Tussaud's went to such lengths to fabricate the representation. We have less complicated symbols at our disposal if we want to denote something. But the fact that there is not just a metal plate at Madame Tussaud's with the inscription "Napoleon" or some identifying description of that person proves that there is more to representation than is suggested by Goodman. A representation of Napoleon is meant to show us what Napoleon looked like when he was alive. Or, to state the essence of the matter, when Madame Tussaud made a representation of Napoleon, she created it out of a *dummy* in such a way that most of what could be attributed to the physical appearance of the real Napoleon could also be attributed to the dummy. The dummy is a mere device to which these attributes can be attached. To use the language of the statement, in representation all emphasis is on the predicate, while the subject-term is a mere logical dummy that has no other function than to serve as a *point d'appui* for the predicates in question. And since only the subject-term in statements has the capacity to refer, we have good reason to believe Goodman incorrect when he states that denotation is the essence of representation.

If we bear in mind that representation always requires the presence of nonreferential dummies, we become all the more interested in Gombrich's and Danto's substitution theory of representation. Both Gombrich and Danto refer to the origins of art: originally, artistic representation of reality was not an imitation or mimesis of reality (as suggested by the intuition that the artistic representation should resemble what it represents) but a substitute for reality.

The artist had the power of making a given reality present again in an alien medium, a god or king in stone: the crucifixion in an effigy true believers would have regarded as the event itself, made miraculously present again, as though it had a complex historical identity and could happen—the same event—at various times and places, roughly perhaps in the way in which the god Krishna was believed capable of simultaneously making love to countless cowgirls in the familiar legend.²⁴

Art is both more and less than a *mimesis* of what is represented. It is more because reality *itself* is made present again in a certain disguise; it is less

24. Danto, *Transfiguration*, 20.

because even the crudest token or symbol may be sufficient to function as an artistic representation of reality (and that is where Goodman was correct). As Gombrich wrote in a famous essay: "the idol serves as the *substitute* of the God in worship and ritual—it is a man-made God in precisely the sense that the hobby horse is a man-made horse; to question it further means to court deception."²⁵ He epitomizes the substitution theory as follows: "all art is image-making and all image-making is rooted in the creation of substitutes."²⁶

At this point it is worthwhile to sound a note of warning against a most illuminating misunderstanding, if I may be allowed this paradox. Critics of Gombrich such as Richard Wollheim have interpreted Gombrich as wanting to say that, ideally, what is represented and its artistic representation are exactly identical and—so Wollheim goes on—"if we took the picture of an object to be that object, what would be left for us to admire?"²⁷ This interpretation of Gombrich's substitution theory owes much of its apparent plausibility to a fatal ambiguity in Gombrich's speculations on the psychology of perception. More than anybody else, Gombrich is aware of "the myth of the innocent eye and of the absolute given."²⁸ How we ultimately see reality is the result of a complex process of interpreting the stimuli of visual perception,²⁹ a process which is studied by perception psychology. This psychological barrier between what is really out there and how we, or the artist, perceive it, is largely responsible for that astonishing lack of constraint upon how reality is or should be represented by the artist—a lack of constraint that has given rise to the variety of styles we know from the history of art.³⁰ Without that barrier, pictorial representation as we know it would make no sense; if we were to see the world as it is, Plato would be correct in maintaining that all artistry is deception. In other words, the phase of the interpretation of our visual stimuli creates that fundamental and persistent ambiguity in our perception of reality which the artist can make use of in order to give us an *illusion* of reality. Thus Gombrich's argument strongly suggests that art attempts to achieve the same effect on the observer as reality itself, while the ambiguities in visual perception

25. E. H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, London, 1973, 3.

26. *Ibid.*, 9.

27. R. Wollheim, *On Art and the Mind*, Cambridge (MA), 1974, 277. It must be noted, however, that Wollheim makes the criticism when discussing Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*. The criticism enjoys a certain popularity and can also be found in the work of Goodman and Danto. Both quote with approval a statement ascribed to Virginia Woolf: "Art is not a copy of the world. One of the damn things is enough." See Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 3.

28. The quotation is from Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 8.

29. This is the main thesis of E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, London, 1960; see, for example, 13.

30. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 17.

have made possible this interchangeability of representation and what is represented. Consequently, whereas Gombrich's original substitution theory did not rule out dramatic differences between representation and what is represented (think of the difference between a hobby horse and a real horse), nor the awareness of such differences on the part of the observer, the main thesis of *Art and Illusion* has a tendency to reduce all artistic representation to *trompe l'oeil* effects.

It was probably Gombrich's aversion to nonnaturalist art that made him confuse the two views and allowed his original substitution theory (which was correct) to be compromised by his naturalist prejudices (correctly criticized by Wollheim).³¹ If this goes unnoticed, it will ultimately result in the victory of the epistemological model of representation. The similarity between reality itself and its artistic representation, thus presupposed, brings about the antithesis of reality *an sich*—which will forever remain unknown—and a transcendental ego, while the cognitive link between the two is made by means of the quasi-epistemological laws of perception psychology. Precisely because the original substitution theory does *not* require any similarity or resemblance between what is represented and its artistic representation, there is no danger of one falling back on the epistemological model. For obvious reasons, epistemology is helpless when asked why and how, for example, a simple stick can be the representation of a horse.

Danto's version of the substitution theory is therefore preferable to Gombrich's, since Danto states quite explicitly that a representation can never be exchanged for what it represents: "the pleasures taken in imitation are, accordingly, something of the same order as one takes in fantasies, where it is plain to the fantasist that it is a fantasy he is enjoying and that he is not deceived into believing that it is the real thing."³² But if the reality represented and its representation are not alike, and if we want to avoid the other extreme of an empty Goodmanian conventionalism with regard to the relation between the two, where then should we look for the golden mean? Here Danto proposes a thesis that is both original and penetrating. It is his view that a symmetry exists between a representation and the reality it represents. That is to say, not only do we have the trivial truth

31. Gombrich's tendency to move away from the position he took up in his *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* toward a more naturalist view of art has grown over the years. In *Art and Illusion* he still rejected Aristotle's mimetic theory of art and preferred the more sophisticated view of Appollonius of Tyana (see *Art and Illusion*, 154). But in his more recent *The Image and the Eye*, London, 1982, he is much more accommodating toward Aristotle. Gombrich's emphasis on *recall* and *recognition* (see, e.g., 12) has probably strongly reinforced his naturalist tendencies.

32. See Danto, *Transfiguration*. For a perceptive and illuminating contrast of fantasy and imagination, see R. Scruton, "Fantasy, Imagination and the Screen," in Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding*, London, 1983.

that a representation is a representation of reality but *also* the reverse: "something is 'real' when it satisfies a representation of itself, just as something is a 'bearer' [of a name] when it is named by a name."³³ Not only is a representation a symbol for reality, but reality is also a symbol for a representation, as is demonstrated by the ontological arrogance of many modern painters.³⁴ Danto elaborates elsewhere on his remarkable thesis about the symmetries between representation and reality by stating that "artistic representation is logically tied up with *putting reality at a distance*" (my emphasis).³⁵ The idea seems to be that representation places us *opposite* reality, and it is only in this way that we become aware of it as such. As long as reality is not represented we remain part of it and we can give no content to the notion of reality. We can only have a concept of reality if we stand in relation to it and that requires that we are ourselves outside it. There is only reality insofar as we are standing opposite it.

At this point we might ask why the privilege of giving content to our concept of reality should be accorded to representation. Epistemologists like Kant, Schopenhauer, or the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* were also in the habit of postulating an opposition between reality and the transcendental ego which, as a condition for the possibility of all knowledge of reality, was itself outside reality. Yet Danto insists that science (and epistemology) do not have this capacity to give content to our concept of reality. Only artistic representation—and philosophy—can do this because of their interest in the gap between language and reality or between appearance (representation) and reality.³⁶

If we want to explain why representation has the unique capacity Danto credits it with, it is most instructive to consider historical representation. As we will see later on, historiography is an even better paradigm of representation than art itself. Let us suppose, for simplicity's sake, that the narrative constructed by the historian in order to represent the past typically consists of a great number of individual statements describing states of affairs in the past. However, apart from their descriptive function, these narrative statements also individuate the historical narrative in which they occur. A historical narrative is what its statements determine it to be. These considerations require us, as I have pointed out elsewhere,³⁷ to postulate a new logical entity: the *narrative substance*. This new logical entity can be defined as follows: The narrative substance of a historical narrative is its set of statements that together embody the representation of the past

33. Danto, *Transfiguration*, 81.

34. See section 4 for what is meant by this *ontological arrogance*.

35. A. C. Danto, "Artworks and Real Things," in M. Philipson and P. J. Gudel, eds., *Aesthetics Today*, New York, 1980, 323; see also Danto, *Transfiguration*, 78.

36. Danto, *Transfiguration*, 77.

37. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, chap. 5.

that is proposed in the historical narrative in question. Thus, the statements of a historical narrative not only describe the past; they also individuate, or define, the nature of such a narrative substance. This enables us to introduce statements of the type " N_1 is P " where N_1 refers to a narrative substance (that is, to a specific set of statements) and where P denotes the property of containing the statement p . We should observe that N_1 is the name of a set of statements and should therefore not be confused with the narrative substance itself since names must be distinguished from what is named by them. It will be obvious that statements like " N_1 is P "—that may be said to express the *narrative meaning* of the statement P —are all analytically true since the attribute of containing p is part of the meaning of the name N_1 . The analytical character of statements like " N_1 is P " is the central theorem of narrative logic. Consequently, the narrative substance does not add anything to what the individual statements of the historical narrative express about the past. Nevertheless, it is an indispensable postulate if we want to discuss the nature of historical representation. This demonstrates that the concept of the narrative substance is perfectly suited to fulfilling the role of those nonreferential dummies discussed in connection with our criticism of Goodman's views on representation and our recommendation of those of Gombrich and Danto. Like these dummies, narrative substances hide, so to speak, behind the properties that can truly be attributed to them and, again like the dummies, they are yet a postulate necessary for the possibility of representation since only they allow us to show (historical) reality in an alien medium (that is, that of the narrativist universe of which the narrative substance is a part).

This shows, first, that Danto was correct in claiming for representation a position different from that of science. Representation involves the postulation of logical dummies, like the narrative substances that are redundant in the case of the sciences. These logical dummies give representational language an opacity unknown in science: every statement we make about the past is absorbed into the gravitational field of the narrative substance in question and owes its narrative meaning to it. In the case of the sciences, we are concerned only with the truth or validity of statements; in (historical) representation, the truth of statements about the past is more or less taken for granted—what counts is that one specific set of statements, and not another, has been proposed, and the narrative substance determines the nature of the proposal. The logical dummies required by the substitution theory of representation mark the distinction between science and representation.

This brings us to a second topic. What point can be given to Danto's claim that representation "puts reality at a distance," that it gives rise to a "concept of reality"? Here the crucial datum is that the notion of the concept of reality is just as much a dummy-concept as the narrative substances

we just discussed. For we might, with good reason, define reality as that for which our true statements are true. If we accept the definition, the notion becomes cognitively redundant since it does not allow us to say more about "reality" than it would be possible for us to say without making use of the notion. Science would surely not be hampered at all in its development if we were to eliminate the word *reality* from our dictionaries. The states of affairs as identified by scientific statements and theories are sufficiently clear, and the use of the notion of the concept of reality might even prove to be a serious obstacle to meaningful scientific debate. Where the relation between words and things has sufficient clarity, the notion of the concept of reality is of no positive use.

But in the case of representation, the dummies of the substitution theory require the corresponding dummy of "the concept of reality." For suppose we left the latter concept out of our account of representation. The result would be the abandonment of an entity for which all the statements of a (historical) representation are true. And with the disappearance of this entity the narrative substance would disintegrate as well: what would be left for it to represent? I will not deny that one might nevertheless persist in condemning the concept of reality as a metaphysical redundancy; after all, one can assert without fear of contradiction that everything outside science is ill-founded nonsense. However, a scientific approach such as this, rather than being the starting point for another theory about representation, just prohibits the development of one.

We thus get the following symmetric picture: Squeezed between two logical dummies that do not add anything to our knowledge of the world—narrative substances and our concept of reality—we find the true statements historians make about the past. These statements are true of both reality (the latter dummy) and of the narrative substances they are part of (the former kind of dummy), since every statement " N_1 is P " (or " N_1 contains p ")—where p is a statement contained by the narrative substance N_1 and where P denotes the property of containing p —must be analytically true. Narrative substances are the representation of historical reality. This is exactly the same as the case of Madame Tussaud's Napoleon; there we would also claim the presence of a dummy for which the same statements we could make about the "real" Napoleon are *also* true. Consequently, we can agree with Danto's claim that representation puts reality at a distance if we take it to mean that, in representation (in contrast to science), two logical dummies are opposed to each other, and that this opposition is the condition necessary for representation to be possible.

It is undoubtedly true that Danto's thesis "*esse est representari*"³⁸ has

38. In view of what was said in the first section I have taken the liberty of paraphrasing Danto's own "*esse est interpretari*"; see Danto, *Transfiguration*, 125.

an idealistic ring to it; is not the upshot of his argument that historical reality is what we think it is? We might be prepared to grant the artist his representational freedom; having had the proper education in art and criticism, we have been taught not to be Philistines telling the artist that reality is different from his representation of it. But with regard to historical representation such Philistinism is generally considered to be the proper attitude. We believe, moreover, that historical debate in the majority of cases is decidable in a way in which debates about different artistic fashions are not. Many historians and philosophers are even adamant that history is a science.

At the risk of being accused of a perverse propensity toward paradox, I will point out below that the reverse is in fact true. If we decide that the argument of the previous pages is idealistic, historiography is even more idealistic than art. However, in the remainder of this section I shall attempt to show that even historiography cannot be meaningfully called idealistic. And, if even *this* most "idealistic" form of representation is free of idealism in the ordinary sense of the word, we can conclude from this state of affairs that representation transcends the old debate about realism and idealism. Epistemology gives rise to that debate; representation does not.

With regard to representation, it will be obvious that the artist is in a more comfortable position than the historian. We can emphasize, as did Gombrich, the uncertainties of our visual perception of the world of things as much as we like, but we should never let this make us forget that landscapes and human faces, and so on, are given to us in a way that the past never is. It is precisely Gombrich's almost effortless move from illusionism to naturalism that suggests that there is room in art for a simple "look and see" ideology that could never be plausible in historiography. There is, so to speak, a "synonymy" between the objects as represented by the artist and the objects themselves that is painfully absent in the historical representation of the past. More than is so of artistic representation, the past is determined by how we represent it. I am not thinking here of the simple fact that worried Oakeshott, Collingwood, and Goldstein so much,³⁹ the fact that we cannot directly perceive the past in the way we can directly perceive landscapes and human faces. What concerns me is, rather, that the links between representation and what is represented are far more fragile in historiography than in art. Historical representations are not so much contradicted by historical reality itself but by other historical representations;⁴⁰ appealing to what reality is like has much more

39. I am referring to what is known in philosophy of history as *constructivism*. See *History and Theory*, Beiheft 16 (1977).

40. F. R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 245.

force in art than in history. We could liken historical reality to a classical theater where a great number of subsequent sets of scenery are placed at different distances from the proscenium. Which scenery will the historian focus his attention on? It seems as if there is no resistance preventing him from moving freely from one set of scenery to another. Nothing here is rigid and fixed; everything gives way easily under the slightest pressure. Representation is above all a question of demarcating contours, of indicating where one object or entity "ends" and another "begins." Representation deals with the contrast between the foreground and the background, between what is important and what is irrelevant. If we bear this in mind, we cannot for a moment doubt that the line of demarcation between, for example, the sky and the trees painted by the painter is much clearer than that between, for example, Hazard's *Crise de la conscience européenne* and the Enlightenment, or between different aspects of the Enlightenment. Here the contours, and representation, are what historical debate wants them to be.

The painter has a frame, a canvas, the laws of perspective that allow him to define these contours and lines of demarcation. Although one might argue, as does Fain, that historians have a similar expedient at their disposal in the speculative systems,⁴¹ this expedient is often rejected by practicing historians, and if it is not, it remains vague and unreliable. The reliance upon chronology (a kind of historical perspective), causality, psychological or sociological laws, and so on, is the most obvious alternative. But as is suggested by the growing skepticism on the part of historians with regard to the help to be expected from the social sciences, these expedients have also lost much of the popularity they enjoyed some twenty years ago.

The only clear contours the past has are of a modal nature: they distinguish between what *did* happen and what *might* have happened but *did not* (and even these contours are only to be found on the rather elementary level of historical facts). However, the contours the artist has to deal with are contours *within* the world seen by him. The contours for the historian are such that they distinguish between what *is* and what *is not*. In the world in which we live and which is represented by the artist, we all recognize familiar patterns (trees, human beings, buildings, and so on); but, in the past, such patterns are never given but always have to be developed or postulated. Although, admittedly, at an elementary (and therefore not interesting) level, certain patterns also tend to recur in the past, as soon as we come to the much more interesting level of historical debate, historical

41. H. Fain, *Between Philosophy and History*, Princeton, 1971.

phenomena are never recognized in the way we recognize the objects of our daily life. In history, it is as if we had to recognize a rabbit or a duck in the well-known rabbit-duck drawing without ever having seen a duck or a rabbit. The historian's practice is in some ways the reverse of answering the Rohrschach test: the historian has to find a hitherto unknown pattern in a medley of relatively familiar things human beings did, wrote, or thought in the past.

If, then, the historian's cognitive predicament is even greater than that of the artist, if his task is like that of discovering patterns of clouds in other patterns of clouds, if nothing seems certain and fixed except for historiographical traditions, practices, or possibly, prejudices, what chance does the historian have of avoiding idealism, of avoiding a modelling of the past in conformity with preconceived ideas that meet with hardly any resistance? Are we not doomed to an idealistic interpretation of historical writing since of *all* disciplines—including even art—the object of historical writing has the least substance of its own and only comes into being thanks to historical representation? Here we encounter the more general philosophical lesson to be learned from our analysis of historical interpretation. For in view of what has just been said, it will be obvious that historical representation is the perfect background for a discussion of realism and idealism. Nobody, and certainly no practicing historian, will for a moment believe that the past is merely an idea of our own—and yet we have seen that the idealist thesis is particularly persuasive in the case of historiography. Historical representation seems congenial to both the realist and the idealist position. Historiography is optimally suited, therefore, to the debate about realism and idealism because it is the discipline of representation *par excellence*—even more so than artistic representation.

First of all, historical representation allows us to give precise meanings to the idealist and realist positions. In historical representation we are confronted with two sets of logical dummies—the narrative substances and the concept of reality. If we bestow an ontological status on the former kind of dummy, idealism will be the result; ontologization of the concept of reality gives us realism. But in neither case is there any need for ontological commitment; logical dummies were all we found at the end of both the route suggested by the idealist and that suggested by the realist. So we can just as well be neither idealist nor realist as both.

The most peculiar feature of this position in the debate about realism and idealism is its neutrality, or, to use a more suitable expression, its evenhandedness with regard to the two alternatives in the debate. What is accorded to the realists should also be accorded to the idealists. On the one hand, we may decide to see only logical dummies if we prefer to avoid any ontological commitment, but in that case we have to take up that position

with regard to *both* narrative substances and the concept of reality. On the other hand, we might prefer to call whatever true statements are true of *real* and in that case we must ontologize *both* narrative substances *and* the concept of reality. In other words, in the first case we are neither idealist nor realist, whereas in the second we should be both. In both cases, however, the dilemma of choosing between the idealist and the realist options has become meaningless: what point could there possibly be in opting for realism if that would of necessity imply opting for idealism as well? By tilting it ninety degrees the problem can no longer meaningfully be stated.

Finally, it should be observed that if epistemology is chosen instead of representation as the background for the debate, the debate cannot be concluded in such a satisfactory way. The relation between knowledge and the world does not present us with anything like the symmetric relation between the two kinds of logical dummies discussed above. Anyone who uses the vocabulary of epistemology will continue to hesitate between realism and idealism; only the vocabulary of representation allows us to rob the debate of all significance and, therefore, in a way to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion.

4. MODERN ART AND MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

One of the most frequently discussed problems in contemporary aesthetics is the problem of the ontological status of works of art. Of course, the art object—be it a painting or a sculpture—is a physical object with certain properties (weight, color, composition, and so on) not giving rise to specific ontological problems. But because most philosophers of art do not wish to identify the aesthetic characteristics of the work of art with its physical aspects “they have been led to postulate a special nonphysical ‘aesthetic object’ which is supposed to be the real work of art and the bearer of aesthetic qualities. This postulate became virtually a dogma of twentieth-century aesthetics.”⁴² A variety of theories was developed to account for these aesthetic qualities, most striking of which was Danto’s and Dickie’s so-called “institutional theory of art.”

That the ontological status of the *aesthetic object* referred to in the above quotation suddenly became a matter of urgency is closely connected with evolutions in modern art. Here I am thinking specifically of the tradition that began with Duchamp’s *ready-mades*. These ready-mades—think of Duchamp’s urinal, Oldenburg’s hole in the ground, or Warhol’s Brillo box—posed the problem of why they were works of art, while their less illustrious counterparts were not. Since there was no difference between

42. B. R. Tilghman, *But Is It Art?* Oxford, 1984, 21.

these ready-mades and their counterparts, which were not in museums, it was necessary at this point for the ontological question of the nature of the aesthetic object to be answered. This development in modern art has been described in a number of ways. Because of the exact similarity of the ready-mades to their less conspicuous equals, one could—for obvious reasons—speak of the “dematerialization of the art object” or, equally obvious, of the “deaesthetization of art.” But in the context of the present discussion, the evolution could best be circumscribed as the last and ultimate victory of representation. At least, this is how Danto wants to see it. His argument is that, precisely because of the exact similarity between the ready-mades in their artistic function and their counterparts outside the museum, the notion of the aesthetic object no longer has any anchor in the work of art as such. Surely it makes sense to say that there is an aesthetic object apart from paint and canvas which conveys the aesthetic meaning of a painting by, for instance, Watteau. But if we think of the ready-mades, the aesthetic object is exclusively “the beholder’s share,” is exclusively contained in the way *we* wish to look at the object of art. In an Hegelian fashion the ready-mades are the *Aufhebung* of art, and art has become a purely intellectual—or, for that matter, philosophical—affair. Traditionally, artistic representation always needed an alien medium in order to express itself; with the gradual disappearance of the aesthetic object, only the pure idea of artistic representation remains, and this pure idea manifests itself in a paradoxical way in the very identifying of the ready-mades with their more common counterparts. In other words, the logical dummies involved in all (artistic) representation demonstrate that they are mere dummies in the startling fact that there is no difference between a Brillo box in the museum and one at the grocer’s. Surely, this is a phase that representation will never be able to surmount. At the same time, it could be said that the history of artistic representation has now toppled over its culmination point and has returned to its original point of departure. The similarity between the ready-mades and how the substitution theory of art sees the origin of art will need no elucidation.

Together with the gradual disappearance of the aesthetic object, the material aspects of the work of art tend to substantialize. They are no longer merely the means for the achievement of an illusion of reality, not a glassy screen we look *through*, but they tend to draw the spectator’s attention to their “raw” and uninterpreted physical qualities. Modern works of art demonstrate a tendency to *return*, so to speak, to their physical qualities. Most illuminating is Danto’s remark urging us to look at the brush stroke of modern painting,

as saying, in effect, about itself, that it *is* a stroke and not a representation of anything. Which the indiscernible strokes made by housepainters cannot

begin to say, though it is true that they are strokes and not representations. In perhaps the subtlest suite of paintings in our time, such strokes—fat, ropy, expressionist—have been read with a deadly literalness of their makers' or the latter's ideologues' intention as (mere) real things.⁴³

We no longer look *through* the representative medium of art but see only *it*. Art becomes like a metaphor for which no literal analogue can be found, yet which achieves this effect by being merely literal itself.

It seems likely that something like this is also discernible in modern historiography. One of the most peculiar features of modern historiography is the popularity of books like Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou*, Ginzburg's so-called *microstorie*, or Natalie Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*, works that might be considered to represent the postmodernist tradition in historiography.⁴⁴ Postmodernist, because the pretensions of the modernist or structuralist representation of the past were recognized as a self-contradictory enterprise and because the past is shown in the guise of apparently trivial events like the inquiry of the Inquisition in fourteenth-century Montaillou, or the abstruse cosmological speculations of a sixteenth-century Italian miller, or in the guise of the true novel of a lost husband. As is well known, postmodernism has always been critical of the grandiose schemes of the modernist, scientific approach to social reality and has always demonstrated a typically Freudian predilection for what is "repressed" as trivial, marginal, or irrelevant.

It is only too easy to underestimate the truly revolutionary character of these postmodernist historical studies. Since historiography has become conscious of itself and of the tasks it had set itself, it has always aimed at a representation of the past in the historical text. As in the case of naturalist painting, the historical narrative implicitly exhorted its reader to look *through* it and, in the same way as the brush strokes of naturalist painting, the linguistic devices the historian had at his disposal allowed him to create an *illusion* of (past) reality. Philosophy of history, especially in its narrativist garb, investigated these linguistic devices of the historian, which were historiography's analogue to the aesthetic object of artistic representation.

With postmodernist historiography, however, doubt has been cast on all this. Instead of constructing a representation of the past in the alien medium of narrative discourse, these *microstorie* themselves take on a reality that had previously only been attributed to the past we saw through historical representations. It is not surprising that Ginzburg once said of his *The Cheese and the Worms* that it was a footnote made into a whole book;

43. Danto, "Artworks," 335.

44. I place this variant of contemporary historiography in the postmodernist tradition in chapter 6.

the *irrealis* of traditional historical discourse ("if one accepts the proposal to see the past from this point of view, then . . .") is exchanged for the *ratio directa* in which historical *reality* represents itself. Ginzburg's story of Menocchio is, therefore, the historiographical counterpart of those brush strokes of modern painting that so much like to focus our attention on themselves. Parallel to the disappearance of the aesthetic object in art, we here observe the gradual disappearance of the intentionalist theses on the past which the classical historian ordinarily submitted to his audience. What remains are these "chunks of the past," these raw stories about apparently quite irrelevant historical occurrences that leave most contemporary historians just as baffled as the visitors to the museum of sixty years ago when they were confronted with Duchamp's ready-mades.

In a way reminiscent of the brush strokes so characteristic of modern painting, "reality" has invaded representation in postmodernist historiography. This becomes clear if we take into account the reason why so many contemporary historians are both alarmed and repelled by the postmodernist innovation of their discipline. What they often understandably object to is the unashamedly anecdotal nature of the microstorie; and because of the anecdotal character of the microstorie these historians wonder whether the microstorie are not merely parasites on the older traditions in historical writing. What would remain of our understanding of the past if all historical writing were to take on the character of the "microstorie"? Indeed, in combination with the older tradition, we can afford to have the microstorie, but ultimately they are only a luxury that would never be able to replace the real thing. In fact, who cares about the musings of Menocchio as long as we are in the dark about that Promethean struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism that took place during Menocchio's lifetime or about the shift in the European economy from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic described by Braudel?

Before all, however, we should be clear about what we mean by the word *anecdote*. We most often speak about anecdotes when we have in mind the *petite-histoire* written by, for instance, De Nolhac, Zweig, or Lenôtre (the latter being, of course, a true master of the genre). The events related in this anecdotal historiography are always the results of more comprehensive historical developments not initiated by these events. What is told in this kind of historiography resembles, so to speak, the *débris* of history carried along by the river of time. More specifically, what the microstorie of the *petite-histoire* tells us about is not representative of their time; other things (related by more serious historians) are representative of *them*. They are turned by the wheels of history without moving anything themselves. Lenôtre's objects of study are epiphenomena of the French Revolution, but it would be nonsense to assert the reverse. And here we

discover the difference between these anecdotes and the alleged “anecdotes” of postmodernist historiography. The microstorie of postmodernist historiography are time-independent in a way anecdotes, in the proper sense of the word, never are. The microstorie stand, so to speak, like solid rocks in the river of time. We could not derive Menocchio’s opinions from the *ouillage mental* of his time (if we could, Ginzburg’s book would be anecdotal); nor do the microstorie help us to understand or to explain it. The microstorie are not representative of anything, nor is anything else representative of *them*.

The effect of these microstorie is thus to make historiography representative only of itself; they possess a self-referential capacity very similar to the means of expression used by the relevant modern painters. Just as in modern painting, the aim is no longer to hint at a “reality” behind the representation, but to absorb “reality” into the representation itself. There is thus a striking parallelism between recent developments in art and in historiography; and we can expect that a closer investigation of this parallelism will further our insight into both lines of development.

5. CONCLUSION

We have found that the vocabulary of representation is better suited to an understanding of historiography than the vocabularies of description and interpretation. What the historian does is essentially more than describing and interpreting the past. In many ways historiography is similar to art, and philosophy of history should therefore take to heart the lessons of aesthetics. An unexpected reshuffling of the relations between the various disciplines resulted from this reorientation in philosophy of history. Since both represent the world, art and historiography are closer to science than are criticism and the history of art; the explanation is that the interpretation of meaning is the specialty of the latter two fields. Somewhat surprisingly, it became clear that historiography is less secure in its attempt to represent the world than art is. Historiography is more artificial, even more an expression of cultural codes than art itself.

Perhaps because of its extraordinary lack of reliable foundations, historiography is a suitable paradigm for studying certain philosophical problems. We have found that historiography is the birthplace of meaning (to be investigated in a later phase by hermeneutic interpretation). Next, historical representation is the general background against which epistemology—codified representation—can fruitfully be studied. And the same is true for the realism versus idealism debate. It has been shown that representation always requires the presence of two sets of nonreferential logical dummies and that disturbing the symmetry between these logical dum-

mies gives rise to the position of realism and idealism. Epistemology is strongly inclined to disturb this symmetry; the whole debate is, therefore, only of limited significance.

Finally, the parallelism between recent developments in art and those in historiography demonstrated how much historiography really is part of the contemporary cultural world, and that it ought to be studied in its relation to contemporary painting, sculpture, and literature. The deficiencies of modern philosophy of history can largely be explained by its tendency to neglect the cultural significance of the writing of history.

FIVE

The Reality Effect in the Writing of History

The Dynamics of Historiographical Topology

1. INTRODUCTION: THE "NEW" VERSUS THE "OLD" HISTORIOGRAPHY

Philosophy of history comprises three areas: historiography, speculative philosophy of history, and critical philosophy of history. Historiography describes the history of the writing of history itself through the ages. The speculative philosopher of history looks for patterns or rhythms in the historical process as a whole; one thinks of the speculative theories of history devised by Hegel, Marx, and Toynbee. Critical philosophy of history, finally, is a philosophical reflection on how historical judgments are formed.¹

Since the second World War speculative philosophy of history has been an issue of debate in philosophy of history only to the extent that its purpose and feasibility have been consistently questioned. Speculative philosophy of history never recovered from the criticism leveled against it by Popper, Hayek, Mandelbaum, and many others, and at present its standing is lower than ever.² In the postwar period, therefore, emphasis has been placed on historiography and critical philosophy of history. The most striking and significant development in history of philosophy in re-

1. For a further explanation of this three-way division, see F. R. Ankersmit, *Denken over geschiedenis. Een overzicht van moderne geschiedfilosofische opvattingen*, Groningen, 1986, 13–15.

2. One thinks here of the so-called "postmodernist" attack on all linear views of history, current in the West since the Enlightenment. Paradigmatic in the rejection of such "metanarratives" is J. F. Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, Paris, 1979. A very clear discussion of the consequences for the writing of history is found in J. Rüsen, "Historische Aufklärung im Angesicht der Post-Moderne: Geschichte im Zeitalter der 'neuen Unübersichtlichkeit'" in Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hrsgb., *Streitfall deutsche Geschichte*, Essen, 1988.

cent years has been the strong rise of historiography (= history of historical writing) at the expense of critical philosophy of history. Philosophical self-reflection on the writing of history no longer has the nature of a philosophical analysis dealing with the origin and reliability of historical judgments, but tends to be a reflection on the past history of historical writing and particularly on what was systematically concealed in it or even "repressed" in the Freudian sense of the word. That shift of emphasis provides the occasion for this essay.

The growing interest in historiography, however, concerns a completely different kind of historiography from that of, roughly speaking, the period before the last decade. One can thus speak of a "new" as opposed to an "older" or traditional form of historiography; the distinction between the two lies in different views on the nature of historical reality, of historical texts, and of the relationship between both. Traditional historiography is based on what one might call a double transparency postulate. In the first place, the historical text is considered to be "transparent" with regard to the underlying historical reality, which the text in fact reveals for the first time. Next, the historical text is seen as "transparent" with regard to the historian's judgement of the relevant part of the past, or, in other words, with regard to the (historiographical) intentions with which the historian wrote the text. According to the first transparency postulate, the text offers us a view "through the text" of a past reality; according to the second, the text is the completely adequate vehicle for the historiographical views or intentions of the historian.

First of all there is a curious "double bind" relationship between these two transparency postulates: on the one hand they are at odds with each other, and on the other hand they presuppose each other. They are at odds with each other because transparency of authorial intention destroys the unobstructed view of the past and vice versa. They presuppose each other 1) because transparency with regard to the past is needed to make the author's intention an identifiable entity (since this requires a constant, common background), and 2) because the transparency of a text with regard to the past is conditional on an authorial intention which "lets the past itself speak." The paradoxes of this double bind can be resolved only if a complete identification of the reality of the past and the author's intention is made possible. From the point of view of the historical object—the past itself—Ranke created such a possibility by requiring the historian to "erase" himself completely from his work in favor of the past itself.³ And from the point of view of the knowing subject—the historian—Collingwood created it by means of his *re-enactment* procedure.⁴

3. L. Ranke, *Sämmtliche Werke*, Leipzig, 1870, 103.

4. "All history is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind." See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford, 1980, 215.

Secondly, both transparency postulates formed the matrix within which traditional historiography could develop. The first transparency postulate guarantees the presence of an unchanging backdrop against which the evolution in the representation of the past over the years can be observed. The second provides the traditional historiographer with an object, in the form of the author's intention, for his writing of history. For without this objectively given authorial intention (of which the text is the adequate vehicle) the historiographer has no guarantee that the evolution observed by him is more than a reflection of his own personal reading experience of various historical texts.

Both these transparency postulates of the old historiography are contested today. An increasing number of critics condemns the transparency postulate of authorial intention as an example of hermeneutical naivety. Both Anglo-Saxon and continental philosophers of history have debated this problem intensely, and it can be maintained that most philosophical disputes about action, speech, intention, and interpretation are ultimately concerned with this matter. Hence there can be no question of discussing it in detail here, and I will confine myself to the following explication. One can distinguish between: 1) the author's intention; 2) the text itself; and 3) the reading of the (e.g., historical) text. When the defenders of the transparency postulate in question focus all their attention on the link between 1) and 2), they are accused by their opponents of presenting the *reading* of the text as essentially nonproblematic. The critics of the transparency postulate, however, concentrate on the reading of the text and in doing so create an interpretative haze which obscures our view of the author's intention once and for all. The link between 2) and 3) becomes the object of all interpretation and the author's intention disappears from view. In this way this complex matter could be summarized.⁵

With the second transparency postulate things are, if possible, even more complicated. The reason for this is that historism—the philosophy of history which to this very day largely determines our thinking about the past—long succeeded in blocking our view of this postulate. We believed that historism, with its critique of the Enlightenment, had taught the historicity of all our thinking—including our thinking about the past. This seemed to rule out a “historically untainted” view of the past, in which case the transparency postulate obviously stood condemned. One of the most important insights offered by Gadamer's *opus famosum*, however, was

5. One of the most remarkable effects of this new approach to texts is that they are detached from their historical context: the interaction between text and its historical context is exchanged for the interaction between the text and the historian or the historiographer. For the first time since historism, the historian is no longer required to place his object of study in its historical context. For a courageous and consistent defense of this unorthodox point of view, see D. LaCapra, “Rethinking Intellectual History,” in La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language*, Ithaca, 1983.

that this accepted account of the debate between historicism and Enlightenment is fundamentally incorrect and that historicism should not be regarded as a protest against but instead as a radicalization of the Enlightenment. Gadamer requires us above all to pay attention to the place of the knowing subject (i.e., the historian). Gadamer points out that historicism excepted this knowing subject itself from its aim to historicize the world. Historicism wanted to have the best of both worlds: against the Enlightenment it recognized the historical character of the world in which we live, but with the Enlightenment historicism believed in the possibility of trans-historical knowledge of this world. And the net result was that historicism by no means rejected the "project of the Enlightenment"—clarification of the nature of social reality—but in fact addressed it with even more powerful, namely historical, instruments. Far from condemning the Enlightenment, historicism was in fact its fulfillment.⁶

Gadamer reformulated this state of affairs in a useful and interesting way by observing that, at the crucial moment, historicism remained faithful to the transcendentalist definition of the knowing subject current in Western philosophy since Descartes. In effect historicism raised the knowing subject to an even more elevated position, towering high above all historical storms, than the Enlightenment had ever done. Historicism's inclusion of itself in the transcendental tradition had two consequences. First, if there is a transcendental (historical) subject that guarantees reliable (historical) knowledge, this leads to a fixation of the (historical) object or of the (historical) reality of which we have knowledge. Reality reflects the knowledge we have of it. Epistemological fixation thus stimulates ontological fixation—in this case the notion of a past reality, constant and existing independently of the historian, which can be studied as an object. A second consequence is that the transparency of the historical text with regard to the past is made plausible. A historically uncontaminated, transcendently knowing subject looks "through the text" at a past reality which lies behind it.

In this way, the framework was created within which traditional historiography was possible. And at the same time we now have an indication of the way in which the new historiography, in contrast with its predecessor, formulates its objectives. For the new historiography, the text must be central—it is no longer a layer *through* which one looks (either at a past reality or at the historian's authorial intention), but something which the historiographer must look *at*. In the new historiography this new postulate of the *nontransparency* of the historical text leads to a concentration on the con-

6. "By the light of this insight it appears that historicism, despite its critique of rationalism and of natural law philosophy, is based on the modern enlightenment and unknowingly shares its prejudices." (H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming, New York, 1986, 239.)

flicts, hesitations, ambiguities, ambivalences—in short, on what Paul de Man has styled the *undecidabilities* of the historical text, in which the nontransparency of the text reveals itself. Psychoanalysis is an instructive model here. Just as psychoanalysis refuses to accept our self-explanations and our speaking about ourself, and instead uses this speaking against itself to show that it conceals an unsuspected mechanism, so the new historiography tries to show what lies hidden behind the apparently open self-presentation of the text. And that is not a reality independent of the text (the past, an intention, the autobiography of the historian, or the social or cultural context in which the historian carried out his work), but a textual mechanism: what was always “repressed” within traditional historiography was the phenomenon of the *text* itself. Traditional historiography always remained blind to the opacity of the historical text and to the fact that historiographical insight is wrested from the text’s obscurities which constitute this opacity. Incidentally, the connection made here with psychoanalysis involves more than just a comparison: psychoanalytical methods and insights have often been adopted *in toto* by the new historiography.⁷

In a very simplified form I have sketched above the transition from the old to the new historiography. What has been gained by this evolution in historiography can hardly be overestimated. In the first place historiography has been stripped of transcendentalist presuppositions recently considered more and more unsuitable for a discipline like the writing of history.⁸ From a more practical point of view the new historiography has enabled us to study historical texts in a new way, to pose new questions and thus gain surprising new insights. Anyone who has read Barthes on Michelet, White on Marx or Droysen, Kellner on Braudel, Bann on Thierry or Barante, or Gossman on Michelet will always view those texts in a different light. The somewhat dusty genre of historiography has been turned into an exciting intellectual enterprise.

Nevertheless some new problems arise. If the new historiography blames its predecessor for putting itself in a position of transcendental isolation with regard to its object, it seems that this reproach can be leveled against the new historiography too. The new historiography often seems no more prepared to “risk” itself historically than traditional historiography. Another problem is that the postulate of the nontransparency or opacity of the text means that sometimes too much attention gets paid to the moments where the historiographical text gets in its own way, where the rhetoric of the text conflicts with its argumentative surface. But even more

7. H. Kellner, “Triangular Anxieties: The Present State of European Intellectual History,” in D. LaCapra and S. L. Kaplan, eds., *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, Ithaca, 1982. See also F. R. Ankersmit, “Twee vormen van narrativisme,” *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 50 (1988): 40–82.

8. That is the leitmotiv of the book by Gadamer mentioned in note 6. For the writing of history this rejection of epistemology is explained in chapter 2 of this volume.

important in the context of this discussion is the following: As a result of the increased emphasis in the new historiography on the text at the expense of the author's intention and the historical reality which the text claims to describe, it has become extremely difficult to ask whether the historical text represents past reality in an adequate way. For the new historiography tends to confine its view to the text: "il n'y a pas de hors texte," to quote Derrida. In this way the limits of the text become the limits of the historical world. And this is not because the new historiography refuses to consider the historiographical problems surrounding the historical world, but rather because it prefers to see such problems as essentially textual or linguistic problems. Thus Braudel is praised in a brilliant essay by one of the major representatives of the new historiography, Hans Kellner, because in his *Méditerranée* he "has expended a great deal of art and energy to create a linguistic solution for a linguistic problem."⁹ This courageous statement by Kellner is in fact a succinct recapitulation of the road followed by philosophy of history over the last ten years and gives us an inkling of the road lying ahead.

To conclude this introduction, the starting point of my argument can be formulated as follows: There is a traditional historiography which is based on a traditional definition (in philosophy of history) of the nature of historical reality, the historical text, and the relationship between both. The last ten years have seen the development of a new historiography which draws much of its inspiration from developments in literary criticism and theory. This strongly text-orientated historiography has marginalized the problem of the relationship between text and historical reality, and hence the biotope of both traditional historiography and traditional critical philosophy of history. As the new historiography gains more and more ground, there is less point in repeating the traditional certainties of critical philosophy of history about the relationship between text and historical reality. By doing so, critical philosophy of history would only succeed in isolating itself. Rather, the critical philosopher of history might ask what is to be understood by historical reality if the way of thinking which underlies the new historiography is accepted. In what follows I wish to develop an approach to this question.

2. CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY AND HISTORICAL REALITY

The task of critical philosophy of history is to study historical method. It is therefore a part—or the counterpart in philosophy of history—of philosophy of science, which examines scientific method. The word *method* is

9. H. Kellner, "Disorderly Conduct: Braudel's Mediterranean Satire," *History and Theory* 19 (1980): 222.

broadly interpreted here. I consider methodical questions not only to be questions about methodology in the strict sense of the word, but also questions about the epistemological or logical status and structure of scientific theories. The inclusion of critical philosophy of history in philosophy of science can certainly be disputed on good grounds, since this inclusion suggests that the writing of history is a science. Opinions differ here and this is in fact one of the main issues in critical philosophy of history.

Given the professional interest of philosophers of science in methods, it is surprising to see how little attention they pay to the method of philosophy of science itself.¹⁰ One might object that every standpoint in philosophy of science is at the same time a view on what is essential in the process of acquiring scientific knowledge and thus involves a methodical recommendation for the philosopher of science to focus his attention on certain matters. In this way, it can be argued that every standpoint in philosophy of science is at the same time a statement about the method that the philosopher of science should follow. The drawback of this argument is that it suggests that the debate on the method of philosophy of science can only be conducted with arguments derived from philosophy of science—and that would obviously condemn this debate to circularity.

Despite the silence maintained by philosophers of science on this point, something can still be said about their method. Philosophy of science is essentially a hermeneutic discipline where, as always in hermeneutics, *one* thing, in this case science, is understood in terms of *another* (of which more later). Its aim is to clarify what science is by projecting the scientific method onto another plane—a procedure perhaps best characterized by the word *mapping*. Mapping is, for instance, the way in which part of the earth's surface is charted by means of projection, so that the distance and shortest route between two points can be determined. The philosopher of science does not offer explanations like the scientist, nor does he carry out empirical research; he clarifies by referring to analogies.

Looking at the history of philosophy of science, we see that in the course of time two proposals were advanced regarding the planes on which science and scientific method were projected. For the inductivism

10. An illustrative example is the introduction (excellent even by international standards) to philosophy of science written by A. A. Derksen, *Rationaliteit en wetenschap*, Assen, 1980. The very first page of this book already thrusts us *in medias res*. An introductory discussion about "the phenomenon of philosophy of science" is conspicuously absent. The suggestion, apparently, is that we have entered the sphere of pure Reason, which no longer needs to subject itself to methodical self-examination. An exception to the rule that philosophers of science are not interested in their own methods is B. Latour, *Science in Action*, Stony Stratford, 1987; see especially pp. 258–259. This equally amusing and revealing book is in fact a continual reflection on the method to be followed by the philosopher of science. Unlike Derksen, Latour is particularly alive to the less rational aspects of scientific research (in his case, biochemistry). This explains his more relaxed attitude toward philosophy of science and his willingness to face methodical determination of it.

of positivism and logical positivism, for Popper's falsification theory and for the many refinements of it by philosophers of science like Lakatos, Sneed, Stegmüller, and so on, logic was the plane on which the procedures of science were projected and in terms of which understanding of these procedures was sought. Now one might object that science does the same thing insofar as scientific language can be projected on the plane of mathematics, but that we cannot therefore talk about hermeneutics in the intended sense. The difference, however, is that scientific language is a language that speaks about a certain part of physical reality, whereas logic is, for the philosopher of science, a language in which he translates the language and procedures of the scientist (with the aim of testing their rationality). *Translation* (with all the hermeneutic associations of that word) is opposed here to *speaking about* (where these associations are lacking). With and after Thomas Kuhn, however, resistance to this logistic hermeneutics of scientific research grew, and since then science was rather projected onto the plane of history or sociology. Within the latter hermeneutic framework the business of science is seen as a process of socialization carried out by the scientific researcher within a certain disciplinary matrix. Science should not be described in a different way from the sociocultural developments discussed by historians in their books and articles.

If this characterization of philosophy of science is basically correct, the following three comments can be added. First, from the perspective of philosophy of science the two planes of projection—logic and history or sociology—are not as different as might at first be supposed. I refer in this connection to Winch's analysis of human action, based on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. According to this analysis, human action is a continual reflection of the logic that governs our linguistic and conceptual categories, and therefore historians and sociologists should take this insight as the starting point of their research.¹¹ Winch's theory raised the obvious objection that the boundaries between logic and sociology are thus eliminated: sociology becomes conceptual analysis. But this objection loses much of its force if, instead of an enquiry into the Azandes or a medieval knight, an enquiry into the actions of the scientific researcher is involved. Certainly the Kuhnian philosopher of science will find little reason to oppose a sociological analysis of scientific method and a sociological determination of scientific logic. But the logicistic philosopher of science, too, cannot argue that it is necessary to distinguish between logic of science and sociology of science without endangering his own enterprise. For any space created by making this distinction is created at the expense of logic of science. Either one considers both to be parallel—and in this case one opts for Winch's line of thought—or one rejects the parallelism

11. P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, London, 1971.

of logic of science and sociology of science—in which case logicistic philosophy of science disqualifies itself as a logicistic utopia. It seems likely, therefore, that Winch's conceptions may prove of further use in defining scientific method more precisely.¹²

Second, in spite of their commensurability for philosophy of science, no two disciplines lie further apart than logic and history or sociology (I leave art and literature out of consideration). Logicians have never been able to cope with the writing of history and their attempts to do so have always been distrusted by historians.¹³ If, nonetheless, these two disciplines, lying as far apart as possible, are the planes of projection on which scientific method is to be mapped, we can conclude that philosophy of science can never be revolutionized again in the manner achieved by Kuhn. For any such attempt will necessarily be an intermediate form of the existing extremes and therefore cannot be essentially new. Only an orientation toward art and literature could prove to be revolutionary in this sense.

This relative standstill which is to be expected in the theoretical debate invites a third comment. The method used within philosophy of science leads *sui generis* to an emphasis on the logical and the historical or sociological, that is to say on the *nonrealistic* aspects of scientific research. These are obviously the aspects which are most easily transposed to the planes of logic and history or sociology. The hermeneutic method of philosophy of science, therefore, is not neutral, since it grants a certain a priori plausibility to nonrealistic interpretations of scientific enquiry. Hence philosophy of science has a permanent tendency to evolve in the direction of positions like the fictionalism or the conventionalism from the time of Duhem and Poincaré, in the direction of the more recent instrumentalism, or that of the constructive empiricism lately held by Van Fraassen.¹⁴ What these standpoints have in common is the idea that scientific theories are not statements about physical reality, but tools that enable us to generate reliable statements about reality: "theories are intellectual tools, not physical ones. They are nevertheless conceptual frameworks deliberately devised for effectively directing empirical enquiry and for exhibiting connections between matters of observation that would otherwise be regarded as ir-

12. That the gap between both traditions of philosophy of science can apparently be bridged in practice is demonstrated in Derksen, *Rationaliteit*, 227.

13. The tragi-comic history of the covering law model testifies to the inability of logicians to say anything useful about the writing of history. The apriorist historical speculations developed in the past by Kant and Hegel, for example, have taught the historian not to expect useful contributions from logicians.

14. "Science aims to give us theories which are empirically adequate: and acceptance of a theory involves as belief only that it is empirically adequate. This is the statement of the anti-realist position I advocate: I shall call it constructive empiricism." (B. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image*, Oxford, 1987, 12.)

relevant.”¹⁵ Of course this instrumentalism leads realists to ask how scientific theories derive their ability to guide us through an external reality which is independent of us. As a result the theoretical debate inevitably resembles an ellipse, with instrumentalism and realism as its two foci. And we must at all times remember here that this debate in philosophy of science largely originates in a theoretical position stimulated by the *method* of philosophy of science, and *not*, therefore, in the realities of scientific research.

Although the value of the debate between constructivism and realism is beyond question, the relative predictability of the main issue imposes limitations. We are led, therefore, to consider alternative theoretical approaches. After what went before, one candidate in particular presents itself. We just observed that realism offers a natural counterbalance to the viewpoints stimulated by the method of philosophy of science. A philosophy of science that concentrates on the nature of scientifically examined reality therefore follows naturally from existing discussions. And going further one concludes that such a philosophy of science will not, given the proper orientation of philosophy of science, be an ontological reflection on this reality, but an enquiry into the nature of this reality as it presents itself in the context of scientific research. In other words, this philosophy of science will not focus on scientific method but on the nature of reality as it is constituted by scientific research and under acceptance of the results of this research.

Moreover, if we agree to define the task of philosophy of science in this way, we can connect up with an earlier proposal. I am thinking of A. G. M. van Melsen’s so-called “natural philosophy.” It is true that Van Melsen first of all presented natural philosophy as being equivalent to scientific research itself, in the sense that both study the same object, physical reality.¹⁶ But gradually—and certainly when discussing the theory of relativity and quantum theory—Van Melsen’s natural philosophy moved in the direction of a philosophical reflection on the *results* of scientific research (i.e., on physical reality as it is constituted within natural science). And although his position remained ambiguous, Van Melsen was prepared to recognize the usefulness of such a “combination of natural philosophy and natural science.”¹⁷ It may be that Van Melsen did not present his ideas convincingly, or perhaps natural science (Van Melsen’s preferred field) is not the most suitable discipline for working out such a philosophy of science, or perhaps there was something flat and stale about his views on natural philosophy, so that they appealed to neither scientists nor philoso-

15. E. Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, London, 1971, 130–131.

16. A. G. M. van Melsen, *Natuurfilosofie*, Amsterdam, 1955; see, e.g., 13, 28.

17. Van Melsen, *Natuurfilosofie*; this is the theme of chapter 7 of Van Melsen’s book.

phers; in any case the fact remains that Van Melsen's natural philosophy has found little response. In itself, however, this involves a challenge rather than a condemnation of a philosophy of science orientated to the results of scientific research rather than to scientific method. Given the extent to which we are today inclined to view reality from the perspective of science, it is actually surprising that philosophy of science has always been so preoccupied with methodical matters and not with the kind of questions suggested here.

This section started with the observation that critical philosophy of history is a part of philosophy of science. After the foregoing we can conclude that there is scope and even need for a critical philosophy of history which uses recent developments in the writing of history to draw conclusions about the nature of historical reality. In the previous section we saw that the reality of the past is propounded as a major problem by the new historiography—and this should be taken all the more seriously, seeing that the new historiography is the most vital branch of present-day philosophy of history. From this point of view, too, critical philosophy of history has the task of reflecting on the results rather than on the presuppositions or foundations of contemporary historical writing. In the remainder of this chapter we shall inquire what notion of the “reality of the past” is implied by the practice of historical writing and by its development over the last two centuries.

3. EARLIER VIEWS ON THE REALITY OF THE PAST

One could fill an encyclopedia of philosophy with the meanings attributed to the word *realism* through the centuries. A distinction drawn by Carnap is useful to start with: “we have to distinguish between two concepts of reality, one occurring in empirical statements and the other occurring in the philosophical statements . . .”¹⁸ On the one hand, there are empirical statements such as “when a zoologist asserts the reality of kangaroos”; on the other hand, there are the realistic, idealistic, or solipsistic views which philosophers express about the nature of reality. This second kind of statement is considered meaningless by Carnap: a statement “has sense only if it concerns elements or parts, not if it concerns the system itself” (i.e., the world as such).¹⁹ Carnap recognizes no middle between statements about parts of the world and about the world as such. Now the interesting and also exceptional thing about the writing of history is that it usually involves the adoption of just such an intermediate position. Al-

18. R. Carnap, “The Rejection of Metaphysics,” in M. Weitz, ed., *20th Century Philosophy: The Analytic Tradition*, New York, 1966, 211.

19. *Ibid.*

though the historian makes statements about empirical matters in the past, these statements are always part of a historical text. And the historian conceives this text in such a way that it can be considered to offer a representation, if not of the whole "system" of the world, then at least of a greater part than Carnap thinks permissible.²⁰ There can be no doubt that Carnap's dichotomy leaves us helpless when we are confronted with the problem of a historical text about Hellenism, for example. The historical text, as Walsh already observed,²¹ lies halfway between the empirical statement and metaphysics. And our question must thus be whether there is a past reality that corresponds to the historical text so far as it exceeds the sum of its individual statements and, if so, what the nature of this reality is. Naturally one can contest the legitimacy of this question by arguing that the text is no more than the sum of its individual statements. This reductionist view is taken by Kuzminski when he says that "we can often if not always check our narratives [i.e., historical texts] against past events [as described in the text's individual statements]." ²² The transition from statement to text is made here by regarding the truth of the text as a truth function of the text's statements. This leads to the following problem: we tend to regard a text consisting of true but irrelevant statements as "less true" than a relevant text which contains some factual errors. If one wishes to maintain Kuzminski's reductionism in the face of this objection, one is caught in a casuistic jungle with no way out.²³

Although the reality of the past is sometimes dealt with in discussions about the truth of historical statements and texts, or about historical interpretation and narrativity, the theme is on the whole a neglected one.²⁴ Only for a few philosophers of history from the first half of this century, like Croce and Collingwood, did the problem have any degree of urgency. The reason for this is that these philosophers of history held an idealistic

20. Unlike the vocabulary of description and explanation and that of hermeneutic interpretation, the vocabulary of representation does not suggest a restriction to parts of the historical text. See chapter 4 of this volume.

21. W. H. Walsh, *Metaphysics*, London, 1963, 172ff.

22. A. Kuzminski, "Defending Historical Realism," *History and Theory* 18 (1978): 344.

23. F. R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*, The Hague, 1983, 62ff.

24. Since it was founded in 1960, the most authoritative international journal of philosophy of history, *History and Theory*, has devoted only four articles to realism. The only article in which realism is considered from the perspective of historical representation (see note 20) and not from that of separate statements about the past is the article by C. Behan McCullagh discussed below in this chapter. Curiously enough, P. Ricoeur's pamphlet, *The Reality of the Past*, Milwaukee, 1984, deals with a completely different subject from the one indicated by the title.

view of historical knowledge while at the same time they were as keen as their realistic opponents to maintain the reality of a past existing independently of us. The manner in which Croce defended the reality of the past in the context of his "radical historicism" is, however, extremely contrived. Like Hegel, Croce held that "the Spirit" makes history. And this process entails that as the Spirit unfolds itself in the course of the historical process (but without a specific goal as in Hegel), the reality of the past changes as well. For instance, it could not be known in the nineteenth century that the reality of the eighteenth century would contribute not only to the characteristics peculiar to the nineteenth century itself, but also to those of the twentieth century. The twentieth century had not been experienced and therefore the relevant part of the reality of the eighteenth century had not yet revealed itself. "On the one hand the reality of the past changes as the spirit grows; on the other hand, there is only the present historian to bring the past to life, on the basis of some present concern, which is itself part of the present that reality has now become."²⁵ In short, the reality of the past changes with the evolution of history and our ideas or our thinking about it—thus Croce attempts to soften the conflict between realism and idealism. One may doubt whether he succeeded in this. What was normally called idealism he simply calls realism, and this kind of terminological manipulation hardly contributes to a solution of the problem.

If Croce approached the problem of the reality of the past *a parte objecti*, Collingwood opted for a strategy *a parte subjecti*, to use his own terminology. Collingwood's reenactment procedure requires the historian to repeat the past (i.e., the ideas thought by agents who lived in the past) in his own mind. In this procedure, past thought is thus transferred to the present and thereby loses its quality of pastness. Hence the past is no more problematic for Collingwood than the reality of the objects we perceive around us. The difficulty here, however, is that the reenactment procedure transfers only the timeless idea to the present and not an act of thinking which *is* situated in the past.²⁶ Collingwood, therefore, has no satisfactory answer to the question of the reality of the past, either.

In the first decades after the second World War the question receded into the background. Theory focused almost exclusively on historical method; this resulted in critical philosophy of history as it existed until recently. Both philosophers of history and historians took it more or less for granted that the past was an object (of study)—a very complex object—that was certainly different but not essentially so from the more triv-

25. D. D. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism*, London, 1987, 149.

26. For this objection see F. R. Ankersmit, *Denken over geschiedenis: Een overzicht van moderne geschiedfilosofische opvattingen*, Groningen, 1986, 79–81.

ial objects contained in our world. And if the theme of the past's reality was discussed at all, it soon merged into the theme of historical truth.²⁷ This tendency is also present in so-called constructivism, the only school in postwar philosophy of history to hold explicit views on the reality of the past. The theory of constructivism was already set out in the thirties by Michael Oakeshott,²⁸ but has recently found a devoted, though far from flexible, advocate in Leon Goldstein.²⁹ By means of a verificationist argument, the reality of the past is not so much denied by Goldstein as deprived of its practical significance for the writing of history. The historian "constructs" his image of the past on the basis of his documentary material—hence the term constructivism—but such images can only be compared *among themselves*. There can be no question of a comparison with the reality of the past *itself*: "What we come to test our claims to historical knowledge against is never the real past . . . to which realists say our accounts refer; we have no access to that past. There is, in other words, no way to determine whether the historian reasoned truly in the realist's sense."³⁰ But Goldstein is just as reluctant to do away with the reality of the past as the realist whom he criticizes, for the passage continues: "It is hard to doubt that there was a real past—or to formulate such a doubt in intelligible language—but I cannot see what role we are to find for it in the practice of history."³¹

These older approaches to the problem of the reality of the past have two shortcomings. First of all, their point of departure lies in separate statements rather than in the text—Croce is possibly an exception here. This reductionist attitude toward the text leads to the problems mentioned at the beginning of this section. A second shortcoming more material to my argument is that the reality of the past is regarded as problematic *not* against the background of the writing of history itself and its results, but against the background of a reality felt to be nonproblematic—especially if one thinks of the kind of objects we find around us. In other words, the starting point is a certain view of reality, and if, next, the writing of history cannot be fitted into this view, some other way around the problem is found. Instead of being the measure of things, the writing of history itself is measured here; for the question is not what the reality of the past must be taken to mean in view of the practice of history but how the reality of the past can be squeezed into our intuitive concept of reality.

27. On this, see Kuzminski, *Historical Realism*; and H. Gilliam, "The Dialectics of Realism and Idealism in Modern Historiographic Theory," *History and Theory* 15 (1976): 231.

28. M. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, Cambridge, 1978, 92ff.

29. L. J. Goldstein, *Historical Knowing*, Austin, 1976.

30. L. J. Goldstein, "History and the Primacy of Knowing," *History and Theory. Beiheft* 16 (1977): 33.

31. Goldstein, "History," 33–34.

A quite different approach emerges from the two essays which Roland Barthes devoted to the reality of the past—and these provide the starting point for the rest of this argument.³²

4. THE REALITY EFFECT IN THE WRITING OF HISTORY, ACCORDING TO ROLAND BARTHES

Roland Barthes's (1915–1980) field of investigation is theory of literature rather than philosophy or philosophy and history. But both in France and in the United States the distinction between literary theory and philosophy (of language) is becoming blurred. This is justifiable inasmuch as literary language is the most complex and interesting kind of language we know and thus preeminently deserves the attention of the linguistic philosopher. A philosophy of language that confines itself to the most elementary forms of language not only succumbs to the dogma that complex forms can be deduced from elementary ones, but also obstructs its view of a number of problems which it wishes to study. In this connection Danto has pointed out that “literature sets up obstacles to the passage of semantical theories [especially with reference to fictive entities] which would go a good deal more easily if literature did not exist.”³³ Barthes is often grouped with the structuralists,³⁴ but he does not seem particularly interested in general statements about the structure of language. Both the essays discussed in this section are even described by Barthes as antistructuralist.³⁵ Barthes's lack of interest in sweeping statements requires an important qualification, however. For it is his persistent concern in showing that the text is the vehicle of a morality, of an ideology, or of a view of reality unsuspected by writer and reader alike—in short, of what Barthes likes to call, rather dramatically, “mythology.” Indeed, the rhetorical aim of the text is to present that mythology as a quasi-natural phenomenon. But the text is the creator of this quasi-natural reality rather than its ideological reflection (here Barthes differs from Marxism).

The central idea in both essays is that the reality of the past must be linked to a so-called reality effect, an *effet de réel* which is created by irrele-

32. R. Barthes, “Le discours de l’histoire,” in Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue*, Paris 1984; R. Barthes, “L’effet de réel,” in Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue*, Paris, 1984. The second, and also more important, of these two essays is also available in English: R. Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in T. Todorov, ed., *French Literary Theory Today*, Cambridge, 1982, 11–18. When discussing this essay, I shall refer to the English translation.

33. A. C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York, 1986, 142.

34. See, for instance, J. Sturrock, “Roland Barthes,” in Barthes, *Structuralism and Since*, Oxford, 1979.

35. Barthes, “Reality,” 11.

vant details mentioned in the historical text.³⁶ The reality of the past is an *effect* caused by a tension in and between historical texts. Barthes shows how in one of his novels Flaubert describes the room of his main character and mentions a pyramid of boxes and cases standing under a barometer. These kinds of details are called *notations* by Barthes; he contrasts them with the main outline of the story, which he labels *predictive*, probably because on this level we can make certain predictions about the development of the story. Using Michelet's reference to certain details in the execution of Charlotte Corday, Barthes points out that a similar tension between prediction and notation can be demonstrated in the writing of history.³⁷ He then goes on to develop a surprising theory about these notations. First of all, and contrary to what we would expect, they are said to embody the highest degree of perfection that language can attain. This is already indicated by the fact that animals do have something reminiscent of predictive language—for instance, bees have “a predictive system of dances, used in foodgathering”³⁸—but the animal world has no equivalent of the linguistic noise or static to which the word *notation* refers. Only human beings can chat. More importantly, the history of rhetoric and literature confirms this idea. It was not until the Alexandrian rhetoric of the second century A.D.—about a thousand years after Homer's epics—that the literary tradition of *ekphrasis* and *hypotyposis* arose. Ekphrasis and hypotyposis were rhetorical compositions describing ways of life, periods, and places (read: historical themes) as elegantly as possible and purely for the sake of description itself. The description, that is to say, did not form a link in some or other comprehensive, *predictive* argument. We are dealing here with an early form of notation and we see how it deliberately breaks away from predictive language for the first time.³⁹

Barthes is concerned with what this means for the writing of history. We associate the reality of the past, he says, with notation rather than with prediction. The predictive is for us a *meaning* conceived or created by the historian; in notation, ekphrasis, or hypotyposis, on the contrary, the past reveals itself as it really was. “Unvarnished ‘representation’ of ‘reality,’ a naked account of ‘what is’ (or was), thus looks like a resistance to meaning, a resistance which confirms the great mythical opposition between

36. One would not wish to exaggerate the originality of Barthes's insights. A comparable point of view is found as early as the twenties in an article by R. Jakobson, “On Realism in Art,” in L. Matejka and K. Pomorska, eds., *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1971, 38–46. Essential elements are also found in nineteenth-century novelists like Flaubert, Baudelaire, or Vogüé and even in eighteenth-century critics and literary theorists. See I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Reading (Eng.), 1957; especially chapter 1.

37. Barthes, “Reality,” 11.

38. Barthes, “Reality,” 12.

39. C. Ginzburg, “Ekphrasis and quotation,” *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 50 (1988): 3–20.

the true-to-life (the living) and the intelligible.”⁴⁰ Unlike what is expressed by notation, meaning is *constructed* and therefore cannot achieve the effect of reality. But we need to consider here that notation is only capable of doing so by its contrast with prediction and meaning.⁴¹ The origin of notation lies there, after all, and not in an extratextual relationship between a description in the text and a state of affairs in the past. This being so, one wonders whether one should speak of a reality illusion rather than a reality effect.

That brings us to the heart of the matter. Is the reality suggested by the opposition of notation and prediction reality or mere illusion? In the Fregean theory of signs with its strict distinction between language and reality it must be called an illusion. Now a peculiarity of the Saussurian theory of signs generally adhered to by French philosophers (and especially as interpreted by Barthes) is that it does not differentiate between language and reality as far as the reference of the sign is concerned. This puts a different complexion on the matter. Thus Barthes can write:

In the first instance the referent is detached from discourse, it is exterior to it; as its foundation the referent is supposed to determine discourse: this is the time of *res gestae*, and discourse presents itself as being simply a *historia rerum gestarum* [that is Frege]. But secondly it is the signifier itself that is suppressed, confounded with the referent; the referent now comes into a direct contact with the signifier [and that is Saussure].⁴² (my translation)

The obvious thing to do in this kind of situation would be to compare the Fregean and Saussurian theories of signs and judge Barthes's suggestions on that basis. But that is precisely the route I decided to avoid in this argument: instead of measuring the writing of history from a predetermined philosophical standpoint, my aim is to arrive at a philosophical standpoint

40. Barthes, "Reality," 14. See also Barthes, "Discours," 165: "En d'autres termes, dans l'histoire 'objective,' le 'réel' n'est jamais qu'un signifié informulé, abrité derrière la toute-puissance apparente du référent. Cette situation définit ce que l'on pourrait appeler *l'effet de réel*." (In other words, in so-called objective history, the "real" is nothing but an unformulated signified, hidden behind the powerful but apparent presence of the referent. This situation defines what one might call *the reality effect*.) Also important here is Barthes's later distinction between *studium* and *punctum*. See R. Barthes, *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie*, Paris, 1981, 49.

41. In a similar context Ehrenzweig speaks of the "uncompromising democracy" which governs the relationship of the important and the unimportant. See A. Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, London, 1973, 43.

42. "Dans un premier temps . . . le référent est détaché du discours, il lui devient extérieur, fondateur il est censé le [i.e., the discourse] régler: c'est le temps des *res gestae*, et le discours se donne simplement pour *historia rerum gestarum*, mais dans un second temps, c'est le signifié lui-même qui est repoussé, confondu dans le référent, le référent entre en rapport direct avec le signifiant." (Barthes, "Discours," 164.)

(here concerning the conflict between Frege and Saussure) based on evidence from the writing of history. Existing views on sign, reality, and reference are the object of this enquiry, not its point of departure.⁴³

As often with novel theories, Barthes's argument perhaps raises more questions than it answers. I do not have the pretension of being able to draw up an exhaustive list of these problems—let alone solve them. I shall therefore confine myself to the three questions which seem to me most important. First, is the connection between the writing of history and the (nineteenth-century) realistic novel suggested by Barthes valid and useful? For in his view, both achieve the reality effect. This leads to a second question: Can the historical text be credited with the ability to bring about a reality effect in the way indicated by Barthes? Third—and this concerns Barthes's most spectacular claim—does Barthes establish a credible link between the reality effect and the opposition of notation and meaning?

5. HISTORICAL WRITING AND THE REALISTIC NOVEL

The preface which Zola later added to *Thérèse Raquin* contains the following passage: "Mon but a été scientifique. . . . Tant que j'ai écrit Thérèse Raquin, j'ai oublié le monde, je me suis perdu dans la copie exacte et minutieuse de la vie, me donnant tout entier à l'analyse du mécanisme humain."⁴⁴ Thus he summarized in a few words the aim of the realistic novel. The theory and practice of the realistic novel has been explained in more detail by literary theorists like Grant, Kohl, Hamon, Demetz, and many others. On the basis of their work the realistic novel can be characterized as follows. It gives copious information about various periods, regions, and social strata; it emphasizes the unexpected, the contingent, and the factual ("chosisme"); it favors referentiality; man is seen as a product of his heredity and of his historical and social environment (Taine); the emphasis is on the typical rather than the exceptional, encyclopedic; time exposition is extremely well-documented and informative, and demonstrates a painful awareness of the writer's subjectivity; a judicious rationing of facts is strived for, the mentality is skeptical; the plot is even-paced and non-dramatic; a dry and direct, transparent style is used, resulting in a "hurried" prose that has no patience with superfluous matter; and, lastly, the intentions are didactic.⁴⁵ Would any historian be ashamed of having

43. F. R. Ankersmit, "Twee vormen van narrativisme," *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 50 (1988): 74-75.

44. E. Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, s.l. n.d. (Livre de poche), 8-9.

45. See D. Grant, *Realism*, London, 1970; P. Demetz, "Zur Definition des Realismus," *Literatur und Kritik* 16/17 (1967): 336, 338, 340-342; P. Hamon, "Un discours contraint," *Poétique* 16 (1976): 413, 415, 417-418, 423, 428, 432, 438; S. Kohl, *Realismus: Theorie und Geschichte*, Munich, 1977, 190, 204; M. Schipper, *Realisme: De illusie van werkelijkheid in de liter-*

several or even all of these qualifications applied to his writing? The mentality of the realistic novel and of the writing of history—as Hayden White has repeatedly pointed out—is the same.

But from the point of view of the reality effect there nevertheless seems to be an important difference between the two. For does not the *reality effect* of historical writing reside in the truth of the individual statements that it makes about the past? The notations of the historical argument are true and this does not apply to the novel, not even to the realistic novel. In the first place, however, the truth of the historical argument's individual statements is not a suitable criterion for distinguishing historical writing from the (realistic, historical) novel.⁴⁶ More important, Barthes situates the reality effect in the text itself, so that the truth of the statements made in the historical text is irrelevant in this connection. It can be countered, however, that within the domain of the text the annotation of the historical text preserves a reference to this truth-speaking about the past. And although it has been said of the realistic novel that "its formal conventions force it to supply its own footnotes,"⁴⁷ the fact remains that annotation of a novelistic text is highly unusual. Yet annotation is not a proper criterion for distinguishing between the reality effect in the realistic novel and the writing of history either. For, a great deal of historical writing, like the realistic novel, is unannotated, and annotation does not turn a text into a work of history.⁴⁸ Thus there are no really obvious objections to Barthes's

atuur, Assen, 1979; see especially chaps. 1 and 5. When Hayden White writes that "realist representation" should be regarded as "the problem of modern historiography," he too takes the term *realism* in a literary-theoretical sense. See H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, 1973, 3; see also 46ff. But, as White goes on to say in reference to Auerbach and Gombrich: "They ask, what are the 'historical' components of a 'realistic' art? I ask: what are the 'artistic' elements of a 'realistic' art?" I only follow him partly in this, however. My aim is, in fact, to show the affinity of these "historical" and "artistic" elements from the point of view of realism.

46. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 19–27; idem, "De chiastische verhouding tussen literatuur en geschiedenis," *Spektator* 16-2 (1987): 91–106.

47. I. Watts, *The Rise of the Novel*, Harmondsworth 1957, 33.

48. Jean d'Ormesson's *A la gloire de l'Empire* is a fictitious history of Europe since the death of Charlemagne. Georges Duby describes his experience of reading this book as follows:

In its presentation this thoroughly imaginary 'history' was accompanied by a complete critical apparatus that the professional historian always adds to his exposition in order to confirm the truthfulness of the information given by him and in order to convincingly assure his reader that his account is based on 'true facts' [sic]. Everything was there, all the artifices of the rhetoric of historical writing, allusions addressed to the *cognoscenti*, a bibliography and footnotes that referred sometimes to invented, sometimes to really existing works of history; I had because of this the impression of a profanation, of a transgression, of the impure, a sickening feeling of disgust. (my translation) (G. Duby and G. Lardreau, *Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft*, Frankfurt am Main, 1982, 45.)

equation of the reality effect in the realistic novel and the writing of history. Against the background of the mentality shared by both, therefore, it is fair to give Barthes the benefit of the doubt for the meantime.

6. HISTORICAL WRITING AND REALISM

This brings us to Barthes's second claim, according to which the historical text has the ability, within certain limits, to create a past reality. This view cuts across the traditional realistic view of the past. The latter view has recently been restated by the Australian philosopher of history Behan McCullagh. Our insight into Barthes's position can be increased by contrasting it with that of McCullagh. McCullagh's crucial assumption is that there is a past reality which is as much a datum as the things we find around us in everyday life. This past reality is made up of various components, such as actions, events, historical processes, which may be the object of historical enquiry. Since humanism and above all since the beginning of the last century, philologists and historians have developed a number of codes and rules to which the study of these objects must comply if one is to arrive at what McCullagh calls a "fair representation of the past."⁴⁹

In effect Barthes turns this around. In his view we do not have these historical codes and rules—and we need not think only of the textual rules to which the historical text must comply—in order to investigate a given historical reality, but rather to *bring about* an *effet de réel*, that is, to constitute a historical reality. It is not true that the historian first has recourse to a generally recognizable historical object, like the French revolution or the birth of the nation-state, which he then tries to describe as accurately as possible by continually comparing the historical original with his historical description of it. This realistic view of how a "fair representation" of the past is reached is naive, since the very question asked in history and the historical debate is what should be *regarded* as the French revolution or the birth of the nation-state.

This should not be misunderstood. There is no suggestion here that the rules and codes that the historian uses are misleading, unreliable, or arbitrary. On the contrary, philology, statistics, the rules for an acceptable historical argument—these often enable us to answer a certain kind of question in a correct and reliable and comprehensible way. The point is that

Duby's sense of disgust at this "transgression" can only be explained by the evident proximity to historical writing of Ormesson's book. And that proves to what extent the reality effect in historical writing depends on the series of rhetorical devices referred to by Duby.

49. C. Behan McCullagh, "The Truth of Historical Narratives," *History and Theory Beiheft* 26 (1987): 30-47.

these rules and codes also suggest this special kind of question and thus unconsciously and unintentionally construct the historical object and the reality of the past. They do not *analyze* a previously given historical reality, but *define* it first. Historical reality is not a datum but a *convention* created by the reality effect. And now it becomes easier for us to understand the long series of attempts, since the days of Ranke, to discipline the practice of history—*discipline* here in both senses of the word. Only through the rules and codes which discipline the historian and his work can a stabilization of the historical object be reached, and only then is collective historical enquiry and historical debate possible. In short, despite appearances, through the reality effect the meaning of the historical rules and codes lies in their fixation of the historical object rather than in their investigation of it. And in fact the realist, naive or otherwise, has every reason to be grateful to the reality effect: it makes the world conform to the way he prefers to see it.

But no doubt some sense of alarm will still be left among naive realists after this, and so I shall briefly return to McCullagh and his realistic ideal of a “fair representation of the past.” McCullagh compares the historian with a portrait painter: both pursue a correct representation of a part of reality and both try to achieve that goal by comparing the original and its representation.⁵⁰ Further on I shall follow McCullagh in this analogy, but I must point out that it operates in McCullagh’s favor, since the historical object is never presented to the historian as clearly as the model to the portrait painter. But even with this handicap, the weakness of McCullagh’s realism can be demonstrated. It is true that both the historian and portrait painter prior to, say, 1900 aimed at a “realistic” interpretation of the world. The astonishing fact, however, is that this attempt at realistic representation in both history and art gave rise to such a wide diversity of styles. This fact, of course, inspired Gombrich’s *Art and Illusion* and his criticism of the “myth of the innocent eye”—criticism apparently wasted on McCullagh.⁵¹

This brings us to the question: what is essentially a “realistic” representation of the world, as we call it? In recent years few people have given as much thought to this problem as Nelson Goodman. First of all, says Goodman, we tend to agree with the naive realist that a realistic representation

50. McCullagh, “Truth,” 34ff. This comparison of the historian with the portraitist is a well-known topos in philosophy of history. Shaftesbury already wrote: “The mere Face-Painter, indeed, has little in common with the Poet; but, like the mere Historian, copies what he sees, and minutely traces every feature, and oddmark” (cited in Watts, *Rise of Novel*, 17). For McCullagh’s naive realism, see also his *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, Cambridge, 1985, chapter 1.

51. “Whenever we receive a visual impression, we react by docketing it, filing it, grouping it one way or another, even if the impression is only that of an inkblot or a fingerprint. The innocent eye is a myth.” (E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, London, 1977, 251.)

must bear a close resemblance to the original. But this cannot be the answer. Rembrandt's portrait of Jan Six is more similar to, for instance, Cézanne's self-portrait than to Jan Six, even if Rembrandt has painted an extremely good likeness. It is simply a fact that a piece of painted canvas is more like another piece of painted canvas than a human being made of flesh and blood, regardless of how each canvas has been painted. Nor is it enough to say with Gombrich that a realistic work of art must create an illusion of the world. We never confuse even the most successful trompe l'oeil painting with the world itself. We can add the following note: There is an interesting series of paintings by Magritte in which various trompe l'oeil are depicted in their environment (for instance *La condition humaine* from 1933). Under these circumstances the trompe l'oeil proves fully capable of achieving its intended effect; here the gap between world and representation is at once stated and destroyed. One could consider these paintings imaginative depictions of naive realism. And the paradox is that one can paint but not actually accomplish what the naive realist aims at.

Like verisimilitude or the creation of an illusion, supplying a maximum of information is no condition for a realistic interpretation: a working plan of a building or a ship provides more information than a realistic depiction, but is not one itself. But, as Goodman continues:

Here, I think, lies the touchstone of realism: not in the quantity of information but in how easily it issues. And this depends on how stereotyped the mode of information is, upon how commonplace the labels and their uses have become. Realism is relative, determined by the system of representative standards given for a given culture or person at a given time.⁵²

In other words, realism is based on a stereotyping of representative codes; and it is these codes which guarantee the *effet de réel* of realism. The similarity to Barthes's views is evident.

This similarity was also noticed by M. Brinker in an essay in which he attacked Goodman's ideas about realism.⁵³ Brinker distinguishes between *seeing* and *representation*: because we *see* the world, we entertain certain notions about it and by these notions we judge the realism of realistic representations. And he concludes that naive realism, which holds that some representations come closer than others to what the world is really like, cannot be dismissed out of hand.⁵⁴ But Goodman rejects the distinction proposed by Brinker: "Seeing is as relative to symbol systems, to conceptual schemes, as variable with habit and convention, as is representation.

52. N. Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis, 1976, 36–37; see also 39: "That a picture looks like nature often means only that it looks the way nature is usually painted."

53. M. Brinker, "Verisimilitude, Conventions, and Beliefs," *New Literary History* 14 (1983): 261ff.

54. *Ibid.*, 265.

The innocent eye is a myth long dead. And beliefs, far from standing as independent criteria for judging representations, are themselves versions.”⁵⁵ So that when Brinker says that some representations come closer to reality than others, we have to ask: “Whose reality?” There seems to be a reality for each representative code, but no ultimate or most fundamental reality which underlies all views of reality. And this is in fact the position Goodman adopts in his suggestively titled book *Ways of Worldmaking*: “If I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more frames of reference; but if I insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say?”⁵⁶ Now, regardless of how far this statement is valid for art and science—Goodman’s preferred fields of reference—for the writing of history it goes to the heart of the matter. The writing of history has no frame of reference which underlies all historical representations. It is true that such a frame was long sought after. The result is found in speculative systems like those of Marx and Hegel. In the writing of history naive realism and speculative systems are, curiously enough, two sides of the same coin. Barthes and Goodman, however, give us a historical reality that agrees with the sceptical spirit and critical sense of modern history.

7. THE PROBLEM OF THE FRAME

Barthes’s third claim is his most striking but also most debatable one. An immediate possible objection is that it cancels itself. For if the opposition between notation and prediction, between *what is* or *what is shown* and meaning creates the reality effect referred to by Barthes, then notation or what is shown in the text acquires a meaning too—so that the distinction between notation and meaning disappears. Barthes might argue, however, that this does not eliminate what *precedes* the assignment of meaning to notation. For the rest, the status of Barthes’s theory remains unclear. Is it a generalization about realistic novels and historical studies? Is it concerned with the psychological and rhetorical effect of texts on the reader that are constructed in a certain way? Or is it both of these things? Barthes’s article does not answer these questions, and in the following discussion of the textual space, in which the opposition between notation and meaning occurs, I shall therefore avoid a commitment to any one approach. As in the previous section, my method will be to map the writing of history on the visual arts. In doing so I shall distinguish between the formal aspects of the textual or pictorial space and the content of this space, starting with the former.

Meyer Schapiro has pointed out that a traditional painting contains a

55. N. Goodman, *Of Mind and Other Matters*, Cambridge (MA), 1984, 128.

56. N. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hassocks, 1978, 2–3.

number of nonmimetic components, components which have no counterpart in the world itself. In the first place, one can think of the rectangular form of most paintings, which naturally corresponds to no part of what is represented. Prehistoric mural paintings do not have this nonmimetic element; the painting is not yet isolated from the space around it. In the first millennium before Christ, paintings are given a frame or the equivalent of one and thus enclose their own space;⁵⁷ only then are effects, reality effects one would almost say—like depth and the distinction between foreground and background—possible. An intermediate form occurs in older Chinese and Japanese art, where the suggested rather than painted sky or foreground does not belong to the painting and is therefore freely inscribed with texts—which do not, of course, belong to the space of the painting. By creating depth and perspective and by separating pictorial space from the space of the spectator, the picture frame is a highly potent generator of what is typical of pictorial meaning. Schapiro's semiotics of the work of art is obviously best illustrated by landscape painting, and that explains perhaps why artists have never made sculptures of landscapes. A sculpture has no frame and shares the same space with the spectator. In sum, the lesson of Schapiro's article is that it shows how what does not belong to the painting partly determines its meaning and that it points to the "several ways in which the ground and the frame, conceived as a non-mimetic field for the elements of imagery, affect their meaning and in particular their expressive sense."⁵⁸ Similar perceptions are found in Derrida.⁵⁹

Proceeding from here we can add a new dimension to our insight into the writing of history. The idea of the frame provides the key. The frame delimits the space of the work of art and the spectator. In painting, the transition from one space to the other is usually quite abrupt, although the figures that move out of the frame in some Baroque frescoes show that this need not be the case. In the writing of history there must be an analogue of the frame: for, like a painting, a historical text represents a part of the world within a space defined by the representation. True

57. M. Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," *Semiotica* 1 (1969): 224–225.

58. *Ibid.*, 241.

59. What Derrida used to denote (especially in *De la grammatologie*) by the term *supplement* appears as the so-called *parergon* in J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and T. McLoad, Chicago and London, 1987. The *parergon* of the work of art is usually the frame around it. "Another common trait is that the framing can also, as *parergon* (an addition external to the representation), participate in and add to the satisfaction of pure taste" (98). And: "the *parergon* (frame, garment, column) can augment the pleasure of taste (*Wohlgefallen des Geschmacks*), contribute to the proper and intrinsically aesthetic representation if it intervenes *by its form* (durch seine Form) and only by its form" (64).

enough, the “frame” of a historical text is much harder to identify than that of a painting, and this is probably why theorists and historians were never aware of its presence. We prefer to concentrate on the “representation” in a historical text and are apt to neglect the semantic space which permitted the representation in the first place. We regard a historical text in more or less the same way that paintings were made in China and Japan before 1850, and a great deal of historical interpretation does in fact have the character of a writing in the semantic space of previous historical representations. In contrast to those paintings, nevertheless, the historical text must have a frame. For if we can say, on the basis of the conclusions reached in the previous section, that we know the reality of the past only in and through representations of the past and if, furthermore, the assumption of a difference between the reality of the past and the present is a condition for all historical writing, then all historical writing must in fact be enclosed by such a frame. The very fact that we are inclined to forget the frame, insofar as it indicates the boundary between past and present, demonstrates the necessity of introducing it as a concept. Historiographers and philosophers of history can therefore still learn quite a lot from Foucault’s insistence on what remains unsaid in a text and how the text is nonetheless embedded in this tacit frame.⁶⁰

Now we can maintain, by analogy with Schapiro’s discussion of paintings, that the frame of a historical text makes an essential contribution to its meaning. In other words, it largely determines our idea of the reality of the past. It goes without saying, furthermore, that historians wish to penetrate more deeply into the reality of the past than an earlier generation of historians. Combining these two facts, we can conclude that the evolution of historical writing is at least partly stimulated by a constant attempt to grow or expand in its framework. To put it irreverently, revolutionary historical writing is like the putti in Baroque frescoes. The development of historical writing is therefore marked by—among many other things—the undoing of older representative strategies. And what a newer kind of history announces as a deeper penetration into the reality of the past is often actually the reverse, namely a step taken from the space of the past in the direction of the space of the reader (i.e., of the present).

All this sounds highly abstract and speculative; the question is what we should take the framework of historical writing to be in concrete terms. But that question is surprisingly easy to answer. The “frame” is the transition between past and present, marking as it does the boundary between both, and it therefore consists of what is not subjected to historical scrutiny. That is to say that it consists of what is felt to be quasi-natural in any

60. M. Foucault, “What Is an Author,” in Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Ithaca, 1986, 113–139.

given phase of historical enquiry. It seems an obvious step to associate this quasi-natural frame with Barthes's notations, since these are the foreground or background against which the meaning of the historical text and thus of the past's reality is created, although they themselves are not involved in that meaning. The attempt of historical writing to grow in its framework thus amounts to an attempt to historicize spheres of quasi-natural notations which are increasingly proximate to us. And that is exactly what the history of historical writing shows, starting with the theological conception of history of historical writing shows, via economic and social history, up to and including present-day mentality history (more about this later). Thanks to Barthes and Schapiro, therefore, we gain an insight into the mechanism which determines the evolution of the writing of history. We can add that the effect of reality (in the writing of history) is not something static; the effect becomes visible only within the dynamics of the expanding framework. Incidentally, this removes an obvious objection to Goodman's theory of realism, which by emphasizing the conventional nature of realism seems to leave little scope for explaining the phenomenon of change in art. But there is no problem here if the reality effect is both conventional and subject to a dynamics of its own.⁶¹

8. THE PULL OF THE FRAME

This dynamic takes us from the formal aspects of Barthes's theory to its content. The point of departure here is again the art of painting—in particular landscape painting. My concern will be with the discovery of the landscape as a generally accepted subject—or content—for the work of art.

Pietro Aretino tells us that he learned to see the beauty of the Venetian twilight only through the paintings of Titian. Similar remarks about landscapes are found in Ruskin, Nietzsche, and Wilde.⁶² Such statements do not involve a *recognition*, as if the painter made us aware for the first time of a landscape which we had always known. Nor is it a matter of seeing the same thing through different eyes, as in Jastrow-Wittgenstein's famous *Gestalt*. There is an *investment* in the new way of seeing which excludes the optional aspect of the *Gestalt*. Through the loss of this optional aspect it is as if the world chooses a world view rather than vice versa. There is no longer a place for the traditional dichotomy between what is (realistically)

61. Brinker formulated this objection. See Brinker, *Verisimilitude*, 258.

62. E. H. Gombrich, "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape," in Gombrich, *Norm and Form*, Oxford 1985, 117; L. B. Cebik, *Fictional Narrative and Truth*, Lanham 1984, 200.

seen and the (idealistic) interpretation plus all the consequent philosophical strategies. More than anything else one is reminded of what Freud indicated by the technical term *cathexis*—and that too is a concept which loses everything by being interpreted in either a realistic or an idealistic sense.⁶³

Gombrich summarizes the usual view of the origin of the landscape as follows:

We hear how the naturalistic landscape backgrounds of fifteenth century paintings swallow up the foreground, as it were, in the sixteenth century till the point is reached with specialists such as Joachim Patinier, whom Dürer calls "the good landscape painter," when the religious or mythological subject dwindles to a mere "pretext."⁶⁴

In short, there was a movement away from the mythological or religious center of meaning to the foreground or background and the result was the naturalistic or realistic landscape. Gombrich subscribes to the "substantial accuracy" of this standard view,⁶⁵ but goes on to emphasize the revolutionary nature, as he sees it, of the landscape as a genre. This revolutionary nature consists in the fact that the movement away from the religious and the mythological is not induced by the pull of a *new* center of meaning, but is rather a movement in the direction of what has hitherto been without meaning (here the landscape differs from the still life, which refers back to an existing system of symbols).⁶⁶ For this very reason landscapes initially lacked prestige. They were referred to as *parerga*, minor works, and were related to Pyreicus, the "rhyparographer," the classical painter of filth and trivia. Quite characteristic are the contemptuous words that Francesco da Hollanda puts in the mouth of Michelangelo: "in Flanders they paint with a view to extol exactness of such things as may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill. . . . They paint stuffs, masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of trees and rivers and bridges which they call landscapes," and Michelangelo makes it quite clear that he prefers by far the traditional religious and mythological centers of meaning.⁶⁷ Some qualification is called for here. Clark and Gombrich already pointed

63. See J. Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, London, 1973, 62. The Freudian Term *Besetzung*, or "cathexis," is defined by Laplanche and Pontalis as follows: "economic concept: the fact that a certain amount of psychical energy is attached to an idea or to a group of ideas, to a part of the body, to an object etc." Psychic reality comes about here through an act of investing, in which the boundary between what is invested in (realistic) and the investing itself (idealistic) can no longer be usefully drawn.

64. Gombrich, "Landscape," 108.

65. Ibid.

66. In particular the kind of symbols as codified in emblematics since Alciati.

67. Gombrich, "Landscape," 114. See also P. C. Sutton, "Introduction," in Sutton, *Masters of 17th-Century Dutch Landscape Painting*, Boston, 1987, 8; see also 4.

to landscapes that originated in existing topoi like the change of the seasons. Sometimes the greatness of God was discerned in the very details of nature: "ex minimis patet Deus."⁶⁸ And Bruyn has recently shown how usefully an iconographic approach can also be applied to seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painting.⁶⁹

The origin of the landscape is a metaphor for the evolution of historical writing. This evolution is not an increasingly deeper penetration into a given historical object (as is perhaps the case in physical science), but a continuing process in which a former center of meaning gives way to what seemed meaningless and irrelevant under the earlier dispensation. And as Origen was convinced of the truth of the Gospel precisely by the triviality and barbarity of the Greek in which it was written, so historians believe that they can grasp truth and reality by mobilizing the irrelevant and the trivial. Let us briefly consider the themes studied in the past two centuries. The starting point is the religious view of history developed by Augustine and still accepted in the seventeenth century by Bossuet. *Weltgeschichte* (world history) and *Heilsgeschehen* (salvation history), in Löwith's words, were still identical here. In the Enlightenment, with its belief in progress, salvation history was secularized and became the triumphant march of human Reason through history. It was Hegel who provided a majestic philosophical foundation for this idea of progress. Closer still to the *notations* of human existence stood the national history of Ranke and German historicism. A new layer of notations previously thought irrelevant was tapped in the social and economic history propagated by Marx and the socialists of the chair. And via legal history, institutional history, the history of geography and climate (Braudel and Le Roy Ladurie), we finally reach the history of mentalities of the past ten to twenty years, in which the joys and sorrows of everyday life, great and small, acquire a historical dimension.

This journey past newer and newer categories of notations is a movement *toward* us, much like the way an actor on stage moves past the various wings in the direction of the audience. This movement of history is therefore not an ever-deeper penetration into the historical object in the sense that every new layer of notations which is tapped explains the previous one. Intellectual history does not explain religious history; economic history—as even Marx himself admitted—does not explain intellectual history and the history of geography and climate; the history of mentalities and the history of gender do not explain economic history or political history. And could the landscape explain the religious or mythological repre-

68. Gombrich, "Landscape," 108; K. Clark, *Landscape Painting*, New York, 1950, 12; P. C. Sutton, *Masters*, 13.

69. J. Bruyn, "Toward a Scriptural Reading of Seventeenth-Century Landscape Paintings," in P. C. Sutton, *Masters*, Boston, 1987, 84-104.

sentation? Nor is this movement a progressive conquest of the objectivity of the historical object in its pristine purity. For there is no permanent historical object; it undergoes a continual metamorphosis within the opposition between notation and meaning. One therefore agrees with Mink, if for different reasons, when he writes that the problem of the ethical and political subjectivity of the historian is an outdated one: the area of tension between notation and meaning has moved beyond the sphere of ethics and politics.⁷⁰

Against this background we can comment shortly on current approaches to history. The so-called covering law model, according to which general laws determine the way that historians describe and explain the past, does not accord with the picture sketched above. The reality of the past lacks the stability of nature, to which the same laws can always be applied. Something similar is true of attempts to reconstruct the historical object by an act of empathy, as proposed by Collingwood and the philosophy of action school.⁷¹ Narrativism falls short on a different count. According to the narrativist the historian projects a unity and coherence onto the past which the past itself does not possess—and here lies the advance on the two approaches just mentioned. The historian does this by telling a story, a narration, about the past. But narrativism is a theory about individual historical texts and not about the evolving practice of history. Perhaps German hermeneutics, Gadamer's in particular, comes closest to the above account. It too emphasizes ontology at the expense of methodology, and unlike narrativism, it too is aware of how the historical object is constituted only in the evolving practice of history. One should recall here Gadamer's notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte*. But there is no important role here for the meaningless static of notation. These critical remarks do not mean that there is no room for the approaches mentioned. On the contrary, the covering law model, hermeneutics, and narrativism offer useful and meaningful characterizations of a *synchronic* cross section of historical enquiry. But if we consider the *diachronic* development of historical enquiry, we are confronted with a mechanism which cannot be resolved into one or more of these approaches, a mechanism which sometimes, indeed, seems opposed to them.

70. "It is no longer so much a question of the social and political interests from whose vantage point history is written as it is of the professional interests which require historians to find new subjects and new methods by which they can make the transition from being consumers to being producers of historiography." (L. O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*, Ithaca, 1987, 91.)

71. For a review of this tradition and its significance for the practice of history, F. R. Ankersmit, "De Angelsaksische hermeneutiek en de geschiedbeoefening," in T. de Boer, ed., *Hermeneutiek. Filosofische grondslagen van mens- en cultuurwetenschappen*, Meppel, 1988, 121–151.

9. HISTORY OF MENTALITIES

Certain developments in twentieth-century art afford a deeper insight into the evolution of historical writing outlined in the previous section. These developments have been discussed by Arthur Danto in a series of articles and books described by Alexander Nehamas as "the most suggestive and exciting project of the philosophy of art in recent years."⁷² Danto's starting point is the question preliminary to all aesthetics: what is art? Prior to 1900 this was not a truly interesting question. Art as a rule aimed at being a mimetic representation of the world. That ideal could not be realized and both facts made the identification of the work of art a simple matter.⁷³ But the problem of what art is has become unexpectedly urgent in our century with the appearance of works of art which have the peculiar property of being indistinguishable from the objects that surround us in everyday life. Examples are Duchamp's ready-mades—the most famous and provocative being the urinal titled *Fountain* from 1917—the Brillo boxes put on exhibition by Warhol in the sixties, and Jasper John's paintings of flags which cannot be distinguished from real flags. These are not trompe l'oeil works, since the latter may be very suggestive representations of the world, but are nonetheless representations. By contrast, the kind of objects Danto has in mind aim at overstepping the boundary between world and representation. With Tilghman one can deny that this kind of object is a work of art, but such a position is dogmatic.⁷⁴ The more so because Danto succeeds in showing that objects of this kind form a logical conclusion to the development of the visual arts since the Renaissance. During this period art obeyed the imperative of replacing, as best it could, an illusion or suggestion of reality by an equivalent of the appearance that phenomenal reality itself presented.⁷⁵ In the ready-mades and the Brillo boxes this development assumes its most dramatic form; for here there are no longer physical, objective differences between the work of art and the world or parts of it.⁷⁶ Precisely because there is no longer any difference between representation and what is represented, the question of what makes a representation a representation now becomes extremely urgent. Danto's own reading of this revolution is that the art we are so familiar with has come

72. A. Nehamas, review of A. C. Danto, "The philosophical disenfranchisement of art" and of Danto, "The state of the art," *The Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988): 214.

73. Strikingly enough, Danto resolutely rejects beauty as a constitutive quality of art. See A. C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York, 1986, 12–13. The meaning of art takes the earlier place of the beauty of art.

74. B. R. Tilghman, *But Is It Art?* Oxford, 1984, 98.

75. Danto, *Disenfranchisement*, 88.

76. Danto, *Disenfranchisement*, chap. 2; idem., *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Cambridge 1983, chap. 4.

to an end and has become a *thinking* about art (about the nature of representation).⁷⁷ The Hegelianism in this account of the matter is evident and is in fact warmly embraced by Danto. But if we formulate the problem of what art is in this way—that is to say, as a question of how we distinguish between a urinal and Duchamp's *Fountain*—then the answer is obvious. There can only be a *difference in interpretation*.

It will have been observed that indiscernible objects become quite different and distinct works of art by dint of distinct and different interpretation, so I shall think of interpretations as functions which transform material objects into works of art. Interpretation is an effect, a lever with which an object is lifted out of the real world and into the art world.⁷⁸

One can still ask *why* a material object is interpreted as a work of art in this way. Danto does not explicitly answer this question, but his theory about what went before these ambivalent objects is a sufficient answer. The development of art pushes in the direction of the interpretation of the ready-mades as works of art. Consequently, of course, a great deal comes to depend on the plausibility of Danto's theory about this development.

If we do in fact interpret the objects as works of art, we are faced with a dilemma, as Danto observes. Duchamp's ready-mades, for instance, can be equally regarded as an absorption of the world by art and as a movement in which art is absorbed by the world. "It is comical how little difference it seems to make whether art is an airy nothing revealing reality in its nakedness, or so gluts itself with reality that between reality and itself there is no real difference."⁷⁹ Danto's view of the evolution of art in our century results not only in a blurring of the distinction between art and reality, but even in what one could call an interflowing of both.

This has an equivalent in the relationship between past and present in the writing of history. Just as the boundary between art and world is blurred in modern art, so the boundary between past and reality gets blurred in the most recent revolutions in historical writing. Unlike recent times, the historical object today often has an elusiveness and transparency which makes demarcation of the boundary between past and present problematic. The writing of history shows a tendency to grow in the framework that separates the reality of the past from that of the present. The most striking evidence of this is provided by the genre of *microstorie*. This genre in present-day historical writing is employed by historians like Carlo Ginzburg (who coined the term), Nathalie Zemon-Davis, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. Its subject matter is invariably a small and insignificant

77. Danto, *Disenfranchisement*, 107ff.; idem., *Transfiguration*, 208.

78. Danto, *Disenfranchisement*, 39.

79. Danto, *Disenfranchisement*, 26–27.

event from the past. In Ginzburg, we are given the history of a miller at the end of the sixteenth century whose unorthodox views attract the attention of the Inquisition; Zemon-Davis tells the story of a clever impostor who for a number of years manages convincingly to take the place of a vanished husband.⁸⁰ Now the curious thing about these microstorie is that they are not only silent about the major events of the time in which they are set but even seem to lack the hallmark of their period. Both microhistories could have taken place in exactly the same way many centuries earlier or later. The historical *meaning*, to use Barthes's terminology, has disappeared and everything has become notation. The sum effect of the microhistories is therefore: rendering the past contemporaneous or, in view of Danto's dilemma, a historicization of the present. Zemon-Davis also drew attention to this when responding to one of her critics. In connection with her book about the pseudohusband, she writes: "In historical writing, where does reconstruction stop and invention begin, is precisely the question I hoped readers would ask and reflect on, the analogy with the uncertain boundary between self-fashioning and lying built into my narrative."⁸¹ The writing of history seems indeed to have reached a stage where the boundary between reconstruction (of the past) and invention (in the present) is overstepped and the contours of the historical object are dissolved. Following Danto's suggestions we must regard microstorie as veiled statements about the nature of historical representation rather than as books in which significant information is presented about, in both cases here, the sixteenth century. These books are not about the past, but about the boundary between the past and the historical representation of it.⁸² They form a curious mixture of theory and history.

To a certain extent the history of mentalities and the history of gender offer a different picture. Yet they show the same peculiarities, if to a lesser degree, and since the history of mentalities currently commands more interest than microstorie, I want to devote a final short discussion to it.⁸³ The history of mentalities is a genre, developed and practiced mainly by French historians, which focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of men and women who lived in the past. It is a history of attitudes, of behavior, of collective, mostly unconscious ideas; it is a history of the child, the mother, the family, love, sexuality, and death.⁸⁴ At first sight one

80. N. Zemon-Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Cambridge (MA) 1983.

81. N. Zemon-Davis, "On the Lane," *The American Historical Review* 93 (1988): 572.

82. F. R. Ankersmit, *Twee vormen van narrativisme*, 72.

83. The microhistories are usually included in the field of mentality history.

84. Vovelle, one of the most prominent practitioners of the history of mentalities, defines it as "a history of attitudes, forms of behavior and unconscious collective representations." This is precisely what is registered in the trends of new research on childhood, the mother, the family, love, sexuality, and death. (M. Vovelle, *Idéologies et mentalités*, Paris, 1990, 5.)

might simply conclude that historians have discovered a number of interesting new research topics. But in a certain respect this existential kind of history breaks with usual historical practice;⁸⁵ for, like the microstorie, it too is bent on marginalizing the historicity of the past. This is also hinted at by Vovelle when he contrasts the concepts of mentality and ideology. The Marxist concept of ideology is of course preeminently suitable for relating the thoughts and feelings of historical agents in the past to the overall pattern of history, that is to the meaning of history. But there is a layer in the world of thinking, feeling, and experiencing which cannot be understood in ideological terms; Vovelle mentions some examples.⁸⁶ This "notational" layer constitutes the domain of the history of mentalities. Vovelle accordingly describes a mentality as "a memory of an empty form";⁸⁷ he talks about "forms of resistance," about "the inertia of mental structures," and even more important, about "those mental realities which are unformulated, those which are apparently 'meaningless,' and those which lead an underground existence at the level of unconscious motivation."⁸⁸ There is a striking similarity to Barthes's contrast between meaning and notation in the way that Vovelle describes the history of mentalities, in its orientation to human existence, as a décor against which the historical process stands out without being an exponent of it. Barthes too sees an opposition between existential environment and that which has meaning: the concreteness of the existential environment "is always brandished as a weapon against meaning, as if there were some indisputable law that what is truly alive could not signify—and vice versa."⁸⁹ Thus the history of mentalities, in its opposition to ideology, exchanges the traditional sphere of *meaning* for that of *notation*.⁹⁰

85. I deliberately use the word *existential*; Mink has pointed out how little affinity phenomenology and existentialism have with the practice of history as we know it, even when they talk about the historicity of man. Historical writing normally leaves the sphere of human existence. Mink makes an exception for Merleau-Ponty. See L. O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*, Ithaca, 1987, chap. 5.

86. Vovelle, *Idéologies*, 4.

87. *Ibid.*

88. Vovelle, *Idéologies*, 8.

89. Barthes, "Reality," 14.

90. The history of gender, which is best regarded as a part of the history of mentalities, provides the best illustration of this inverse movement. Precisely because the history of gender offers insights into the past which involve a certain commitment from us—unlike, for instance, a history of death—the movement from meaning to notation stands out in all its essential sharpness. Prior to the history of gender, as various people have pointed out, women were usually regarded as belonging to the sphere of what is stable, unchanging, natural: in a word, as belonging to *nature*. "Die Frauen sind hier begrifflich in der Sphäre der Stabilität angesiedelt, in der Sphäre dessen was als 'natürlich' und folglich unveränderlich in den menschlichen Beziehungen erscheint." (G. Pomata, "Die Geschichte der Frauen zwischen

In the history of mentalities we see the disappearance of various barriers that keep past and present separate in other parts of history. This is to be expected in view of the preeminence given to notation over prediction and meaning. We can explain this as follows. In the past two centuries historians created a series of more or less complicated intellectual constructions, in the form of notions like *people*, state, nation, social class, social structure, intellectual movement, which could come to embody the distance between past and present. In terms of these and other notions, the past was constantly analyzed in its quality of being different from the present. The fact that we always talk about the history of a certain people, of a certain nation, social class, and so on—which undoubtedly suggests a continuity between past and present—makes us forget that the past was divorced from the present precisely under cover of such notions. These notions have proved to be useful tools for the historian and it is unthinkable that they should be discarded. They enable us to give a meaning to the past and determine our own place in the historical process.

Nevertheless, the history of mentalities and the history of gender have given rise to a form of history which is indifferent and perhaps even hostile to notions of this kind. For where notation takes precedence over meaning these notions can no longer be accommodated. The recognition of meaning in notation is a contradiction in terms. In the history of mentalities, and specifically the history of gender, the boundary between present and past is therefore blurred. In the history of mentalities we are concerned with our medieval or modern ancestors in a way that differs little from our relationship with a peculiar neighbor or colleague. The protective shell of the historical disappears. When reading a study in the history of mentalities—and that applies *a fortiori* to the microstorie of Ginzburg and Zemon-Davis—we are struck by the unusual directness with which the past manifests itself. And this also perhaps explains the popularity of this kind of history with a large audience of nonhistorians.

10. CONCLUSION

We can now sum up. According to Barthes the reality of the past is an effect created by the historical text. That is the essence of the matter. Barthes's standpoint sounds antirealistic since it leaves no margin for a historical reality existing outside the historical text. It certainly must be in-

Anthropologie und Biologie," *Feministische Studien Heft 2* (1983): 113–127; see especially 114); see also U. Wesel, *Der Mythos vom Matriarchat*, Frankfurt, 1980, 122ff. In the history of gender this quasi-natural "meaning" is converted into notations in the Barthesian sense. History thus recovers lost ground from the social sciences, and this provides an indication of how the border conflicts between history and the social sciences can best be settled.

interpreted as antirealistic on the basis of a Fregean theory about the relation between sign and referent. There the referent is part of reality exterior to text and sign. As we saw in the discussion of Barthes, Saussure leaves room for a textual definition of referent and reality. Now, the interesting thing about Barthes's theory is that it does in fact project the reality of the past as an external reality in spite of its textual origin.⁹¹ For, this theory is at least partly capable of explaining the evolution of historical enquiry, how the discovery of new, hitherto unsuspected objects of historical enquiry takes place, and so it undoubtedly goes beyond an idealistic or constructivist view of historical reality. From the perspective of this theory the past is our idea of the past and lacks the objectivity which it has in Barthes. The practice of history and Barthes thus force us to give up the Fregean theory of the relation between sign and referent when we are talking, at any rate, about reference and reality in the practice of history.

Next we tried with the help of Barthes and Goodman to determine the content of the notion of past reality. Historical reality is created where existing representative strategies in history generate an opposition between meaning and notation. One cannot infer from this that the most recent form in which the opposition occurs—and in our time one might think of the history of mentalities—is also the highest form of historical enquiry. That would certainly be at odds with the practice of history, where forms of history developed in the past survive without difficulty beside more recent forms. In itself this fact appears hard to reconcile with Barthes's ideas, at least so far as they suggest that all older forms of history must be assigned to the realm of meaning. But for various reasons, that suggestion need not be followed. First of all, why should a more recent reality effect necessarily undo an earlier reality effect? Second, and in connection with the foregoing, because there is no explicative relation between historical objects of enquiry, it is quite conceivable that the various forms of history can exist side by side in relative isolation. And third, again in connection with the foregoing, since the dynamics implied by Barthes lead from meaning to notation (and not vice versa), this kind of relative isolation is in fact to be expected. How can the meaningful be explained in terms of meaningless notation? So it is reasonable to see the reality effect as a trail through history rather than as only that part of the trail that was most recently traversed.

We can even go a step further and allow that an earlier part of the trail

91. The realist in the Barthesian sense can probably reconcile himself with a definition of realism given by Putnam: "A realist (with respect to a given theory or discourse) holds that 1) the sentences of that theory are true or false; and 2) that what makes them true or false is something external—that is to say, it is not (in general) our sense data, actual or potential, or the structure of our minds, or our language, etc." (quoted in B. C. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image*, Oxford, 1980, 8).

is sometimes to be preferred. This is best illustrated with reference to politics. Nineteenth-century novelists like Flaubert and Huysmans and critics like Emile de Vogüé were well aware that literary realism also embodied a political program: that of democracy. And, in fact, a definition of social reality—and realism aimed at such a definition—cannot be politically indifferent. All politics take place within a consensus on that definition. In accordance with the intuitions of the above authors, one might call the representative democracy that developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries *the politics of realism*. For, representative democracy always set itself the goal of offering a clear and undistorted view of the objective political reality (i.e., the electorate); but, as in the practice of history, this political reality was only generated in and through representation.⁹² And even more important, this politics of realism in fact displays the same dynamics as the reality effect in historical research. Here too we have a movement that starts with a fixation on the forming of the nation-state, and then moves down, via the legal and political system of the constitutional state and via the organization of the national economy, to the trivial details in the existence of John Citizen. This parallelism between politics and historical enquiry need no longer surprise us now. However, it can be argued that the late nineteenth-century state was more successful in sharply defining its objectives and arriving at a balanced consideration of ends and means than the state today. By saying this I do not intend to praise an earlier definition of the political or historical reality over later definitions, but only to show that the point can at least be usefully discussed and that what comes last is not necessarily best.

Contrary to usage in the recent past, my argument has compared the writing of history not with science but with realism in literature and the visual arts. It never follows from such comparisons that the writing of history *is* in fact a science or an art form. The seductive appeal of the kind of non sequitur derives from the tendency to turn the observed parallels into foundations of the writing of history. Thus ten to twenty years ago many people regarded the parallels between science and history (the existence of which no one doubts) as the basis on which the truth and reliability of historical knowledge could be established. In the attempt to do so the parallels in question changed from *signs* into *proofs* of the scientific nature of historical enquiry. One sees the same thing when Croce says that history is an art form. After the objections against epistemology raised by Rorty and many others, such attempts to found disciplines on the basis of philosophy of science have lost much of the plausibility which they had had since Descartes and, above all, Kant. It is folly to think that a venerable disci-

92. F. R. Ankersmit, "Politieke representatie: Betoog over de esthetische staat," *Bijdragen en mededelingen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 102 (1987): 374.

pline like history needs to be founded in this sense at all, and it is even more foolish to entrust the task to philosophers. Not just the best but the only convincing argument in favor of or against historical viewpoints is a historical argument and not a philosophical one. In science or historical enquiry we see epistemology and philosophy of science in action.

The results and the development of scientific or historical research may, however, give the philosopher food for thought. Not so as to arrive at a Kantian “critique of knowledge,” but in order to see how science and history can complicate our commonsense notions about truth, knowledge, and reality. The question here is not whether and how the historian arrives at historical knowledge about a past reality, but what meaning we can assign to the concepts of truth and reality on the basis of what the practice of history shows. Here philosophy is not the foundation of history, but history is the foundation of philosophy. For the writing of history and for philosophy of history, this kind of demarcation can be an improvement, since only too often have they stood in each other’s way.

SIX

Historiography and Postmodernism

My point of departure in this article is the present-day overproduction in our discipline. We are all familiar with the fact that in any imaginable area of historiography, within any specialty, an overwhelming number of books and articles is produced annually, making a comprehensive view of them all impossible. This is true even of the separate topics within one and the same speciality. Let me illustrate this with an example from political theory, a field with which I am fairly familiar. Anyone who, some twenty years ago, wanted to go into Hobbes's political philosophy needed only two important commentaries on Hobbes: the studies written by Watkins and Warrender. Of course, there were more even then but after reading these two books one was pretty well "in the picture." However, anyone who, in 1994, has the courage to try to say anything significant about Hobbes will first have to read her or his way through a pile of twenty to twenty-five studies which are as carefully written as they are extensive; I will spare the reader an enumeration of them. Moreover, these studies are usually of such high quality that one certainly cannot afford to leave them unread.

There are two aspects to the unintended result of this overproduction. In the first place, the discussion of Hobbes tends to take on the nature of a discussion of the *interpretation* of Hobbes, rather than of his work *itself*. The work itself sometimes seems to be little more than the almost forgotten reason for the war of interpretations going on today. In the second place, because of its evident multi-interpretability, Hobbes's original text gradually lost its capacity to function as arbiter in the historical debate. Owing to all the interpretations, the text *itself* became vague, a watercolor in which the lines flow into one another. This meant that the naive faith in the text itself being able to offer a solution to our interpretation problems became just as absurd as the faith in a signpost attached to a weather vane.

The paradoxical result of all this is that the text itself no longer has any authority in an interpretation and that we even feel compelled to advise our students not to read *Leviathan* independently; they are better off first trying to hack a path through the jungle of interpretation. To put it in a nutshell, we no longer have any texts, any past, but only interpretations of them.

When I read the reviews and notices announcing new books in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *New York Review of Books*, or in the professional journals which are increasing in number at an alarming rate, I do not doubt that things are very much the same in other areas of historical writing. The situation which Nietzsche feared more than a hundred years ago, the situation in which historiography itself impedes our view of the past, seems to have become reality. Not only does this flood of historical literature give us all a feeling of intense despondency, but this overproduction undeniably has something uncivilized about it. We associate civilization with, among other things, a feeling for moderation, for a happy medium between excess and shortage. Any feeling for moderation, however, seems to have been lost in our present-day intellectual alcoholism. This comparison with alcoholism is also very apt because the most recent book or article on a particular topic always pretends to be the very last intellectual drink.

Of course, this situation is not new and there has therefore been no lack of attempts to retain some reassuring prospects for the future for disheartened historians. The Dutch historian Romein saw in this overproduction a tendency toward specialization; he therefore called for a theoretical history that would undo the pulverization of our grasp of the past which had been caused by specialization. Theoretical history would be able to lift us to a more elevated viewpoint from which we would again be able to survey and to bring order to the chaos caused by specialization and overproduction.¹ But Romein's book on the watershed of two ages is proof that this "theoretical history" was not the safe route toward integration of the results of specialist research he thought it was. Above all, the problem seems to be that on this higher theoretical level postulated by Romein a real interaction among the various specialities remains difficult to realize. Integralist historical writing leads to enumeration rather than to integration.

Another way out of the dilemma is the strategy adopted by the historians of the *Annales* school. They have devoted their attention chiefly to the discovery of new objects of inquiry in the past; with this strategy they do indeed allow themselves the change of once again finding history in an unspoiled state. Of course, this offers only temporary solace: before too

1. J. Romein, "Het verguisde beeld," and "Theoretische geschiedenis," in M. C. Brands, ed., *Historische lijnen en patronen*, Amsterdam, 1971.

long, countless other historians, French or not, will pounce upon these new topics and soon they too will be covered by a thick and opaque crust of interpretations. There is, however, more to be said about how resourceful the *Annales* school is in finding new and exciting topics. In the course of this chapter I shall return to this matter.

The crucial question now is what attitude we should take with regard to this overproduction of historical literature which is spreading like a cancer in all fields. A reactionary longing for the neat historical world of fifty years ago is just as pointless as despondent resignation. We have to realize that there is no way back. It has been calculated that at this moment there are more historians doing historical research than the total number of historians from Herodotus up until 1960. It goes without saying that it is impossible to forbid the production of new books and articles by all these scholars currently writing. Complaining about the loss of a direct link with the past does not get us any further. However, what does help and does have a point is the defining of a new and different link with the past based on a complete and honest recognition of the position in which we now see ourselves placed as historians.

There is, moreover, another reason to make an attempt in that direction. The present-day overproduction of historical literature can indeed be called monstrous if our point of departure is *traditional* ideas about the task and the meaning of historiography. Historical writing today has burst out of its traditional, self-legitimizing, theoretical jacket and is therefore in need of new clothes. This is not in order to teach the historian how he should set about his work as a historian, nor to develop a Nietzschean theory about what are the uses and disadvantages of history for life. With regard to the uses of history, there is no point outside historical writing itself from which rules for the historian's method of work can be drawn up: if historians consider something to be meaningful, then it is meaningful, and that is all there is to it. And with regard to the disadvantages, I do not believe that historical writing is useful or has a recognizable disadvantage. By this I do not mean that historical writing is useless, but that the question concerning the usefulness and disadvantage of historiography is an unsuitable question—a *category mistake*, to use Ryle's expression. Along with poetry, literature, painting, and the like, history and historical consciousness belong to culture, and no questions can meaningfully be asked about the usefulness of culture. Culture, of which historical writing is a part, is rather the background *from which* or *against which* we can form our opinion concerning the usefulness of, for example, certain kinds of scientific research or certain political objectives. For that reason, science and politics do not belong to culture; if something can have a use or a disadvantage or enables us to manipulate the world it is not a part of civilization. Culture and history define utility, but precisely because of that, they can-

not themselves be defined in terms of utility. They belong to the domain of the *absolute presuppositions*,² to use Collingwood's terminology. This is also the reason why politics should not interfere with culture.

That is why, if we were to try to find a new jacket for contemporary historical writing, as was considered necessary above, the most important problem would be to situate it within present-day civilization as a whole. This problem is of a cultural-historical or an interpretative nature, and could be compared with the sort of problem which we sometimes pose for ourselves when we are considering the place and the meaning of a particular event within the totality of our life history. In general, it is strange that historians and philosophers of history have paid so little attention over the last forty years to parallels between the development of present-day historical writing on the one hand and that of literature, literary criticism, printing—in short, civilization—on the other. Apparently, the historian did not see any more reason to suspect the existence of such parallels than did the chemist or the astronomer.

It is not my goal to determine here the place of historical writing in this way. Instead, I will move further away to ascertain whether the overproduction in historical writing has its counterpart in a considerable part of present-day civilization and society. Who does not know the cliché that we are living in an age of an information surplus? In the course of all this theorizing about information—which is more profound at some times than at others—two things stand out that are of importance for the rest of this chapter. In the first place, it is strange that one often talks about information as if it is something almost physical. Information “flows,” “moves,” “spreads,” “is traded,” “is stored,” or “is organized.” Lyotard speaks of the State as a body which restrains or disperses information flows.³ Information appears to be a sort of liquid with a low viscosity; we are flooded by it and are in imminent danger of drowning in it. Second, when we talk about information, information as such has assumed a conspicuously prominent place with respect to the actual subject matter of that information. This relationship was usually the other way around. Take a statement giving information such as: “In 1984 Ronald Reagan was elected President of the US.” This informative statement immediately gives way to the state of affairs described by it. However, within our present-day way of speaking about information, the reality which that information concerns tends to be relegated to the background. The reality is the information itself and no longer the reality behind that information. This gives information an autonomy of its own, a substantiality of its own. Just as there are laws describing the behavior of things in reality, it would also seem possible for

2. R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Oxford, 1940.

3. J. F. Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, Paris, 1979, 15.

there to be a scientific system for describing the behavior of that remarkable liquid we call information. Incidentally, I would like to add at this point that, from the perspective of Austin's speech act theory, information could just as well be said to be purely performative as not at all performative. This is certainly one of the fascinating aspects of the phenomenon of information.⁴

In recent years, many people have observed our changed attitude toward the phenomenon of information. Theories have been formed about it and the theoreticians concerned have, as usually happens, given themselves a name. In this context we often talk about postmodernists or poststructuralists and they are, understandably, contrasted with the modernists or structuralists from the recent past. In 1984, an interesting conference in Utrecht was devoted to postmodernism, and anyone who heard the lectures read at the conference will agree that it is not easy to define the concepts *postmodernism* or *poststructuralism* satisfactorily.⁵ Nevertheless, it is possible to discern a general line, as did Jonathan Culler.⁶ Science was the alpha and omega of the modernists and the structuralists; they saw science as not only the most important given but at the same time the ultimate given of modernity. Scientific rationality, as such, does not pose a problem for postmodernists and poststructuralists; they look at it, as it were, from outside or from above. They neither criticize nor reject science; they are not irrationalists, but they show the same aloofness with respect to science as we observed above in our present attitude toward information. This is not a question of metacriticism of scientific research or scientific methods, as we are used to in philosophy of science. Philosophy of science remains inherent in the scientism of the modernists; philosophers of science follow the line of thought of scientists and study the path they have covered between the discovery of empirical data and theory. For postmodernists, both the philosophy of science and science itself form the given, the point of departure for their reflections. And postmodernists are just as little interested in the sociological question of how research scientists react to one another as they are in what the relation is between science and society. The postmodernist's attention is focused neither on scientific research nor on the way in which society digests the result of scientific research, but

4. Information is performative, has purely *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* force, because the constative element has been lost; information is not performative, because it is subject to its own laws and not to those of interhuman communication—intercommunication is only a part of the life of information.

5. W. van Reijen, "Postscriptum," (9–51), and W. Hudson, "The Question of Postmodern Philosophy?" (51–91), in W. Hudson and W. van Reijen, eds., *Modernen versus postmodernen*, Utrecht, 1986.

6. J. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, London, 1985, 18ff.

only on the functioning of science and of scientific information itself.

For postmodernism, science and information are independent objects of study which obey their own laws. The first principal law of postmodernist information theory is the law that information multiplies. One of the most fundamental characteristics of information is that really important information is never the end of an information genealogy, but that its importance is in fact assessed by the intellectual posterity it gives rise to. Historical writing itself forms an excellent illustration of this. The great works from the history of historiography, those of Tocqueville, Marx, Burckhardt, Weber, Huizinga, or Braudel, proved repeatedly to be the most powerful stimulants for a new wave of publications, instead of concluding an information genealogy as if a particular problem had then been solved once and for all: "Paradoxically, the more powerful and authoritative an interpretation, the more writing it generates."⁷ In the modernist view, the way in which precisely interesting information generates more information is, of course, incomprehensible. For modernists, meaningful information is information which does put an end to writing; they cannot explain why precisely what is debatable is fundamental to the progress of science, why, as Bachelard said, it is the *debatable* facts which are the *true* facts.

It is important within the framework of this article to look in greater detail at this postmodernism which is ascientistic rather than antiscientistic. First, it can teach us what we should understand by postmodernist historical writing and, second, that historical writing, remarkably enough, has always had something postmodernist about it. A good example of a postmodernist criterion of science is Nietzsche's *deconstruction*—to use the right term—of causality, which many consider to be one of the most important pillars of scientific thought. In causalistic terminology, the cause is the source and the effect the secondary given. Nietzsche then points out that only on the basis of our observation of the effect are we led to look for the causes and that therefore the effect is *in fact* the primary given and the cause the secondary given. "If the effect is what causes the cause to become a cause, then the effect, not the cause, should be treated as the origin."⁸ Anyone who puts forward the objection that Nietzsche has confused the order of things in research and reality is missing the point of Nietzsche's line of thought; for the point is precisely the artificiality of the traditional hierarchy of cause and effect. Our scientific training has, so to speak, "stabilized" us to adhere to this traditional hierarchy, but beyond this intellectual training there is nothing that forces us to do so. Just as much, albeit not *more*, can be said in favor of reversing this hierarchy.

7. Ibid., 90.

8. Ibid., 88.

This is the way things always are in postmodernism. Science is “destabilized,” is placed outside its own center; the reversibility of patterns of thought and categories of thought is emphasized, without suggesting any definite alternative. It is a sort of disloyal criticism of science, a blow below the belt which is perhaps not fair, but which for that very reason does hit science where it hurts most. Scientific rationality is not *aufgehoben* in a Hegelian way to something else, nor is it true to say that every view automatically evokes its antithesis; it is rather the recognition that every view has, besides its scientifically approved inside, an outside not noticed by science. In his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had already suggested something similar with respect to every valid line of reasoning. It is in fact the valid line of reasoning that aims to make itself superfluous, which therefore is always a journey over the territory of the untrue—that is, the journey from initial misconception to correct insight. Consequently, what is true always remains tainted by what is untrue.

Both a logical and an ontological conclusion can be attached to this insight; together they give an idea of the revolutionary nature of postmodernism. Let us first look at logic. For the postmodernist, the scientific certainties on which the modernists have always built are all variants on the paradox of the liar. That is, the paradox of the Cretan who says that all Cretans lie; or, to put it more compactly, the paradox of the statement “this statement is untrue,” where this statement is a statement about itself. Of course, all the drama of postmodernism is contained in the insight that these paradoxes should be seen as unsolvable. And here we should bear in mind that the solution to the paradox of the liar—which Russell, with his theory of types and his distinction between predicates and predicates of predicates, proposed in the *Principia Mathematica*—is still recognized today as one of the most important foundations of contemporary logic.⁹ The postmodernist’s aim, therefore, is to pull the carpet out from under the feet of science and modernism. Here, too, the best illustration of the postmodernist thesis is actually provided by historical writing. Historical interpretations of the past first become recognizable—they first acquire their identity—through the contrast with *other* interpretations; they are what they are only on the basis of what they are *not*. Anyone who knows only one interpretation of, for example, the Cold War, does not know any interpretation at all of that phenomenon. Every historical insight, therefore, intrinsically has a paradoxical nature.¹⁰ No doubt Hayden White, in his *Metahistory*—the most revolutionary book in philosophy of history over the

9. J. van Heijenoort, “Logical Paradoxes,” in P. Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* vol. 5, London, 1967, 45–51.

10. F. R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian’s Language*, The Hague, 1983, 239–240.

past twenty-five years—was thinking along the same lines when he characterized all historical writing as fundamentally ironic.¹¹

Let us now turn to ontology. In his deconstruction of the traditional hierarchy of cause and effects, Nietzsche was playing off our way of speaking about reality against processes in reality itself. The current distinction between language and reality thus loses its *raison d'être*. In particular, scientific language is no longer a "mirror of nature" but just as much a part of the inventory of reality as the objects in reality which science studies. Language as used in science is a thing,¹² and as Hans Bertens argued at the Utrecht Conference on postmodernism,¹³ things in reality acquire a "language-like" nature. Once again, historical writing provides the best illustration for all this. As we will see presently, it is historical language which has the same opacity as we associate with things in reality. Furthermore, both Hayden White and Ricoeur (whom I certainly do not mean to call a postmodernist) like to say that past reality should be seen as a text formulated in a foreign language with the same lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic dimensions as any other text.¹⁴ It is equally characteristic that historians in their theoretical reflections often show a marked tendency to speak about historical language as if it were part of reality itself and vice versa. Thus, Marx spoke of the *contradiction* between the production forces and production relations as if he were discussing *statements* about reality instead of *aspects* of this reality. Similarly, historians very often would like to see the same uniqueness realized for historical language as is characteristic of historical phenomena.¹⁵ In short, the latent and often subconscious resistance to the language/reality dichotomy—which historians have always displayed, in fact—had its origin in the unconsidered but nevertheless correct insight of historians into the fundamentally postmodernist nature of their discipline.

When the dichotomy between language and reality is under attack we are not far from aestheticism. For, both the language of the novelist and of the historian give us the illusion of a reality, either fictitious or genuine.

11. H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, 1973, 37.

12. See chapter 3.

13. H. Bertens, "Het 'talige' karakter van de postmoderne werkelijkheid," in Bertens, ed., *Modernen versus postmodernen*, 135–153. Bertens's position is actually still modernist: his thesis that language can never represent the fullness of reality makes him choose a position *within* the polarity of language and reality, instead of outside it as would be required by the postmodernists.

14. White, *Metahistory*, 30; P. Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in P. Rabinow and W. M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretative Social Science*, London, 1979, 73.

15. Von der Dunk, *De organisatie van het verleden*, Bussum, 1982; see, for example, 169–170, 344, 362.

More important still, Gombrich has in various works taught us that the work of art, that is to say, the language of the artist, is not a *mimetic reproduction* of reality but a *replacement* or *substitute* for it.¹⁶ Language and art are not situated *opposite* reality but are themselves a pseudo-reality and are therefore situated *within* reality. As a matter of fact, Megill, in his brilliant genealogy of postmodernism, has shown to what extent postmodernists—from Nietzsche up to and including Derrida—want to extend aestheticism over the entire domain of the representation of reality.¹⁷

This aestheticism is also in harmony with recently acquired insights into the nature of historical writing—that is, the recognition of its stylistic dimension. To the modernists, style was anathema or, at best, irrelevant. I quote C. P. Bertels: "Fine writing, the display of literary style, does not add an iota of truth to historical research nor to any other scientific research."¹⁸ What is important is the content; the way, the style in which it is expressed, is irrelevant. However, since Quine and Goodman, this pleasant distinction between form or style and content can no longer be taken for granted. Their argument can be summarized as follows: If various historians are occupied with various aspects of the same research subject, the resulting difference in *content* can just as well be described as a different *style* in the treatment of that research subject. "What is said . . . may be a way of talking about something else; for example, writing about Renaissance battles and writing about Renaissance arts, are different ways of writing about the Renaissance."¹⁹ Or, in the words of Gay, *manner*, style, implies at the same time a decision with regard to *matter*, to content.²⁰ And where style and content might be distinguished from one another, we can even attribute to style priority over content; for because of the incommensurability of historical views—that is to say, the fact that the nature of historical differences of opinion cannot be satisfactorily defined in terms of research subjects—there remains nothing for us but to concentrate on the style embodied in every historical view or way of looking at the past, if we are to guarantee the meaningful progress of historical debate. Style, not content, is the issue in such debates. Content is a derivative of style at the level of historiographical progress as resulting from historical debate.

The postmodernist recognition of the aesthetic nature of historical

16. E. H. Gombrich, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse, or the Roots of Artistic Form," in P. J. Gudell, ed., *Aesthetics Today*, New York, 1980.

17. A. Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, Berkeley, 1985; see in particular 2–20.

18. C. P. Bertels, "Stijl: een verkeerde categorie in de geschiedwetenschap," *Groniek* 89/90 (1984): 150.

19. N. Goodman, "The Status of Style," in N. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hassocks, 1978, 26.

20. P. Gay, *Style in History*, London, 1974, 3.

writing can be described more precisely as follows: In analytical philosophy, there is the phenomenon of the so-called "intensional context." An example is the statement "John believes that *p*" or "John hopes that *p*" (where *p* stands for a particular statement). The point is that in an intensional context like this, *p* can never be replaced by another statement, even if this other statement is equivalent to *p*, or results directly from it. After all, we do not know whether John is, in fact, aware of the consequences of his belief or hope that *p*. It is possible that John believes that the water is boiling, to give an example, without his believing that the temperature of the water is a hundred degrees centigrade. In other words, the exact form in which a statement in an intensional context was formulated is one of the prerequisites for the truth of this statement. The sentence attracts, so to speak, attention to itself. Thus, the *form* of the statement is certainly just as important here as the *content*. In a particularly interesting book, Danto has pointed out that this intensional nature of statements and texts (or at least some of them) is nowhere clearer than in literature: "We may see this [this intensional element] perhaps nowhere more clearly than in those literary texts, where in addition to whatever facts the author means to state, he or she *chooses the words* with which they are stated" and the literary intention of the writer "would fail if other words were used instead."²¹ Because of its intensional nature, the literary text has a certain opacity, a capacity to attract attention to itself, instead of drawing attention to a fictitious or historical reality behind the text. And this is a feature which the literary text shares with historical writing; for the nature of the view of the past presented in a historical work is defined exactly by the language used by the historian in his or her historical work. Because of the relation between the historical view and the language used by the historian in order to express this view—a relation which nowhere intersects the domain of the past—historical writing possesses the same opacity and intensional dimension as art.

Art and historical writing can therefore both be contrasted with science. Scientific language at least has the pretension of being transparent; if it impedes our view of reality, it will have to be refined or elucidated. It is true that some philosophers of science want to attribute even to science the aforementioned aesthetic and literary dimensions. That would, of course, lend some extra plausibility to my claim regarding historical writing, but I see the differences between the exact sciences and historical writing as *more* than a question of nuances. Where the insight provided in a discipline is far more of a syntactical than of a semantic nature—as is the

21. A. C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge (Ma), 1983, 188.

case in the exact sciences—there is comparatively less room for intensional contexts. After all, only from the perspective of semantics is it meaningful to ask the question as to whether there is synonymy or not (and that is the most important issue in intensional contexts).

If we are in agreement with the above—that is to say, with the applicability of postmodernist insight to historical writing—I would like to draw a number of conclusions before rounding off this chapter. For the modernist, within the scientific worldview and within the view of history we all initially accept, evidence is, in essence, the evidence that something happened in the past. The modernist historian follows a line of reasoning from his sources and evidence to a historical reality hidden behind the sources. However, in the postmodernist view, evidence does not point toward the *past* but to other *interpretations* of the past; for that is what we in fact use evidence for. To express this by means of imagery: for the modernist, the evidence is a tile which he picks up to see what is underneath, for the postmodernist, on the contrary, it is a tile which he steps on in order to move on to other tiles: horizontality instead of verticality.

This is not only an insight into what actually happens but just as much an insight into what historians should concentrate on in the future. The suggestion could best be described as an absorption of the historical source in the present. Evidence is not a magnifying glass through which we can study the past, but bears more resemblance to the brush strokes used by the painter to achieve a certain effect. Evidence does not send us back to the past, but gives rise to the question as to what a historian here and now can or cannot do with it. Georges Duby illustrates this new attitude toward evidence. When his intelligent interviewer Guy Lardreau asks him what constitutes for him, Duby, the most interesting evidence, he says that this can be found in what is not said, in what a period has *not* said about itself, and he therefore compares his historical work with the development of a negative.²² Just as the fish does not know that it is swimming in the water, what is most characteristic of a period, most omnipresent in a period, is unknown to the period itself. It is not revealed until the period has come to an end. The fragrance of a period can only be inhaled in a subsequent period. Of course, Hegel and Foucault have already made many interesting comments about this. However, the point here is Duby's observation that the essence of a period is determined by the *destinataire*, to use the term of the French postmodernists, by the historian who has to develop here and now his negative of a period from that which was not said or was only whispered, or was expressed only in insignificant details. The historian is like the connoisseur who recognizes the artist not by that which is

22. G. Duby and G. Lardreau, *Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft: Dialoge*, Frankfurt am Main, 1982, 97–98.

characteristic of him (and consequently imitable) but by that which, so to speak, spontaneously "escaped" him. "Le style, c'est l'homme," as Buffon said, and our style is where we are ourselves without having thought about ourselves. That is why so few people still have style in our narcissistic era. In short, the way of dealing with the evidence as suggested by Duby is special because it points not so much to something that was concealed behind it in the past, but because it acquires its point and meaning only through the confrontation with the mentality of the later period in which the historian lives and writes. The mentality of a period is revealed only in the difference between it and that of later period; the direction in which the evidence points thus undergoes a shift of ninety degrees. As has so often been the case, this, too, had been anticipated by Huizinga. Writing about the historical sensation, he says:

This contact with the past, which is accompanied by the complete conviction of genuineness, truth, can be evoked by a line from a charter or a chronicle, by a print, a few notes from an old song. It is not an element introduced into his work by the writer [in the past] by means of certain words . . . *The reader brings it to meet the writer*; it is his response to the latter's call.²³ (my emphasis)

It is not surprising that Duby and Lardreau point out in this connection the relation between historiography and psychoanalysis.²⁴ In both historical writing and psychoanalysis, we are concerned with interpretation in the most fundamental sense of the word. In historical writing, this way of dealing with traces of the past, as suggested by Duby, compels us to refrain from searching for some initially invisible machine in the past itself which has caused these traces to be discernible on the surface. In the same way, psychoanalysis, in spite of the positivist notes struck by Freud himself, is in fact a repertory of interpretation strategies. Psychoanalysis teaches us to understand what the neurotic *says* and does not draw our attention to the causal effects of a number of elementary and undivided homunculi in his mind.²⁵ Both the psychoanalyst and the historian try to project a pattern *onto* the traces and do not search for something *behind* the traces. In both cases, the activity of interpretations is understood strictly nominalistically: there is nothing in historical reality or in the mind of the neurotic that corresponds with the content of interpretations.²⁶

23. J. Huizinga, "De taak der cultuurgeschiedenis," in *J. Huizinga: Verzamelde werken*, vol. 7, Haarlem, 1950, 71–72.

24. Duby and Lardreau, *Geschichte*, 98ff.

25. This is the *leitmotiv* in D. P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis*, New York, 1982.

26. Lardreau expressed this for historical writing in the following way:

Thus we have nothing but discourses about the past and these discourses, in their turn, consist of nothing else but discourses in which the interests of the present are

However, there is a still more interesting parallel to psychoanalytic interpretation. Of course, Duby's thesis that the historian should pay attention to what is not said and to what is suppressed—madness, untruth, and taboo, to use Foucault's criteria—is obviously related to the analyst's method of work. Just as we are what we are not, or do not want to be, in a certain sense the past is also what it was not. In both psychoanalysis and history, what is suppressed manifests itself only in minor and seemingly irrelevant details. In psychoanalysis, this results in the insight that man does not have an easily observable being or essence on the basis of which he can be understood, but that the secret of personality lies in what only rarely and fleetingly becomes visible behind its usual presentation. Our personality is, as Rorty put it, a collage rather than a substance: "The ability to think of ourselves as idiosyncratically formed collages rather than as substances has been an important factor in our ability to slough off the idea that we have a true self, one shared with all other humans. . . . Freud made the paradigm of self-knowledge the discovery of little idiosyncratic accidents rather than of an essence."²⁷

This is also the case in contemporary historical writing, at least in what I would like to call postmodernist history (of mentalities). To formulate this in the paradoxical manner so popular among postmodernists: the essence of the past is not, or does not lie in, what a former generation of historians recognized as the essence of the past. It is apparent randomness, the slips of the tongue, the *Fehlleistungen* of the past, the rare moments when the past "let itself go," where we discover what is really of importance for us. I suspect that at least a partial explanation can be found here for what Jörn Rüsen referred to as the *paradigm change* in present-day historical writing, a paradigm change which in his opinion consists mainly of exchanging *makrohistorische Strukturen* for *mikrohistorische Situationen und Lebensverhält-*

mobilized. The result is a very precisely staged ballet of masks that represents the interests and conflicts of the present, with changing roles but invariable points of view—history becomes a dressing-up of imaginary inscriptions and the historian a dressmaker arranging dresses that never were new: history is a texture made of the substance of our dreams and our short memory enveloped in a slumber. (my translation) (Duby and Lardreau, *Geschichte*, 10.)

As Lardreau realizes himself, this is, before anything else, a poetic rendering of historical nominalism: we only have words and names and we should distrust each attempt to establish fixed relations between words and reality. In fact this historical nominalism is a continuation of the historian's critical sense, of his wish to question each attempt "to put the past into words" rather than the lingualism or textual idealism that is so often associated with it. One should note the affinity between this historical nominalism and instrumentalism in order to realize how much this historical nominalism bespeaks an attitude of philosophical abstention and critical sense.

27. R. Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection," in Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2, Cambridge, 1991, 155.

nisse as the object of the historian's attention.²⁸ What we are witnessing could perhaps be nothing less than the definitive farewell for the time being to all the essential aspirations which have actually dominated historical writing as long as it has existed. Historians have always searched for something they could label as the essence of the past—the principle that held everything together in the past (or in a part of it) and on the basis of which, consequently, everything could be understood. In the course of the centuries, this essentialism in historical writing has manifested itself in countless different ways. Of course, essentialism was conspicuously present in the various speculative systems which have directed the thinking of Western man about this past. The Augustinian theological concept of history and its secularized variants,²⁹ the idea of progress, with its blind faith in the progress of science and the social blessing it was expected to bring, were always the *metanarratives*, to use Lyotard's term, by means of which not only historical writing but also other fundamental aspects of civilization and society were legitimated.³⁰

Then came historism which, with a strange naiveté,³¹ saw the essence of the past as embodied in a curious mixture of fact and idea. The epistemological naiveté of the historicist doctrine of historical ideas was only possible in a time when the belief and faith in the perceptibility of the essence of the past were so easily taken for granted that nobody had an inkling of his own ontological arrogance. The social history discussed by Rüsen was the last link in this chain of essentialist views of history. The triumphant note with which social history made its entry, particularly in Germany, is the most striking proof of the optimistic self-overestimation on the part of these historians, who feel they have now found the long-sought-after key which will open all historical doors. Anyone who is aware of the essentialist nature of this social history and of the traditional enmity between essentialism and science cannot fail to notice the ludicrous nature of the pretensions of the social historians. But the worst modernists are still to be found among philosophers of history—which, incidentally, is not so surprising; they cheer any pseudoscientific ostentation even more readily than do historians, as soon as they think they see in it the confirmation of their worn-out positivist ideas.

I would like to clarify the movement in historical consciousness indicated above by means of the following image. Compare history to a tree.

28. *Programmaboek Congres "Balans en Perspectief,"* Utrecht, 1986, 50.

29. This, of course, refers to K. Löwith's thesis in his *Meaning in History*, Chicago, 1970.

30. Lyotard, *Condition*, 49–63.

31. F. R. Ankersmit, "De chiasische verhouding tussen literatuur en geschiedenis," *Spektator* (October 1986): 101–120.

The essentialist tradition within Western historical writing focused the attention of historians on the trunk of the tree. This was, of course, the case with the speculative systems; they defined, so to speak, the nature and form of his trunk. Historism and modernist scientific historical writing, with their basically praiseworthy attention to what, in fact, happened in the past and their lack of receptiveness toward apriorist schemes, were situated on the branches of the tree. However, from that position their attention did remain focused on the trunk. Just like their speculative predecessors, both the historists and the protagonists of so-called scientific historical writing still had the hope and the pretension of ultimately being able to say something about that trunk after all. The close ties between this so-called scientific social history and Marxism are significant in this context. Whether it was formulated in ontological, epistemological, or methodological terminology, historical writing since historism has always aimed at the reconstruction of the essentialist line running through the past or parts of it.

With postmodernist historical writing—found, in particular, in the history of mentalities—a break is made for the first time with this centuries-old essentialist tradition—to which I immediately add, to avoid any pathos or exaggeration, that I am referring here to trends and not to radical breaks. The choice no longer falls on the trunk or on the branches but on the leaves of the tree. Within the postmodernist view of history, the goal is no longer integration, synthesis, and totality, but it is those historical scraps which are the center of attention. Take, for example, *Montaillou* and other books written subsequently by Le Roy Ladurie, Ginzburg's microhistories, Duby's *Sunday of Bouvines*, or Natalie Zemon-Davis's *Return of Martin Guerre*. Fifteen to twenty years ago we would have asked ourselves in amazement what the point could be of this kind of historical writing, what it is trying to prove. And this very obvious question would have been prompted then, as it always is, by our modernist desire to get to know how the machine of history works. However, in the antiessentialist, nominalistic view of postmodernism, this question has lost its meaning. If we want to adhere to essentialism anyway, we can say that the essence is not situated in the branches, nor in the trunk, but in the leaves of the historical tree.

This brings me to the main point of this chapter. It is characteristic of leaves that they are relatively loosely attached to the tree and when autumn or winter comes, they are blown away by the wind. For various reasons, we can presume that autumn has come to Western historiography. In the first place, there is, of course, the postmodernist nature of our own time. Our antiessentialism—or, as it is popularly called these days, *anti-foundationalism*—has lessened our commitment to science and traditional historiography. The changed position of Europe in the world since 1945 is a second important indication. The history of this appendage to the

Eurasian continent is no longer world history.³² The trunk of the tree of Western history now strikes us as merely being part of a whole forest. The *meta-récits* we would like to tell ourselves about our history, the triumph of Reason, the glorious struggle for emancipation of the nineteenth-century workers' proletariat, are only of local importance and for that reason can no longer be suitable metanarratives. The chilly wind, which—according to Romein—rose around 1900 simultaneously in both the West and the East,³³ finally blew the leaves off our historical tree as well in the second half of this century.

What remains now for Western historiography is to gather the leaves that have been blown away and to study them independently of their origins. This means that our historical consciousness has, so to speak, been turned inside out. When we collect the leaves of the past in the same way as Le Roy Ladurie or Ginzburg, what is important is no longer the place they had on the tree, but the pattern we can form from them *now*, the way in which this pattern can be adapted to other forms of civilization existing now. "Beginning in the days of Goethe and Macaulay and Carlyle and Emerson," wrote Rorty, "a kind of writing has developed which is neither the evaluation of the relative merits of literary productions, nor intellectual history, nor moral philosophy, nor epistemology, nor social prophecy, but all of these mingled together in a new genre."³⁴ In his commentary on this statement of Rorty's, Culler points out the remarkable indifference with regard to origin and context, historical or otherwise, which is so characteristic of "this new kind of writing":

The practitioners of particular disciplines complain that works claimed by the genre are studied outside the proper disciplinary matrix: students of theory read Freud without enquiring whether later psychological research may have disputed his formulations; they read Derrida without having mastered the philosophical tradition; they read Marx without studying alternative descriptions of political and economic situations.³⁵

The right historical context has lost its traditional importance, function, and naturalness as background, not because one is so eager to take up an ahistorical position or lacks the desire to do justice to the course of history, but because one has "let go of" the historical context. Everything now an-

32. Striking proof of the sharply decreased significance of the European past is offered by M. Ferro, *Comment on raconte l'histoire aux enfants à travers le monde entier*, Paris, 1981.

33. J. Romein, *Op het breukvlak van twee eeuwen*, vol. 1, Amsterdam, 1967, 35. Because Marxism shared a number of important political and social ideals with the West, Marxism was the most serious challenge the West has faced during this century. It is, therefore, possible that the defeat of Marxism will stimulate again the West's confidence in itself and in its historical development. This might bring about a rebirth of historical essentialism and of a Fukuyama-like triumphalism.

34. Quoted in Culler, *Deconstruction*, 8.

35. *Ibid.*

nounces itself unannounced, and in this lies the only hope we still have of being able to keep our heads above water in the future. Just as the leaves of the tree are not attached to one another, and their interrelation was only guaranteed by the branch or the trunk, it was the above-mentioned essentialist assumptions which used to ensure the very prominent role played by this reassuring "historical context."

Don't misunderstand me; I am not talking about the candidacy of a new form of subjectivity, the legitimization of imposing contemporary patterns on the past. Legitimizing anything at all is best left to the modernists. The essence of postmodernism is precisely that we should avoid pointing out essentialist patterns in the past. We can consequently have our doubts about the meaningfulness of recent attempts to breathe new life into the old German ideal of *Bildung*, or edification, for the sake of the position and the reputation of historical writing.³⁶ I would, incidentally, like to add immediately that I am nevertheless much more in sympathy with these attempts than with the scientific naiveté demonstrated by social historians regarding the task and the usefulness of historical writing. However, going into the hopes raised by a socioscientific historical writing would be flogging a dead horse. But the resuscitation of the ideal of *Bildung* undoubtedly is a meaningful reaction to the map-like nature of our present-day civilization. Whereas civilization in the past showed more resemblance to a direction-indicator which provided relatively unambiguous directions for social and moral behavior, present-day civilization does not teach us where we have to go any more than a map does; nor, if we have already made our choice, does it teach us whether we should travel by way of the shortest route or by way of picturesque detour. Realization of the ideal of *Bildung* would at most give us a good picture of the road we have travelled up until now. The ideal of *Bildung* is the cultural counterpart of Ernst Haeckel's famous thesis that the development of the separate individual is a shortened version of that of the species. *Bildung* is the shortened version of the history of civilization on the scale of the separate individual, through which he can become a valuable and decent member of our society.

However, within the postmodernist historical consciousness, this short-

36. See E. H. Kossmann, *De Functie van een Alpha-Faculteit*, Groningen, 1985; Kossmann also observes that the *Bildung* ideals of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries can no longer be realized in our time:

It is, after all, self-evident that an ideal of *Bildung* in today's situation cannot be a homogeneous, prescriptive pattern of ethical and aesthetical standards and set erudition. Rather it will be in the form of an inventory of possible ethical and aesthetic standards, of objectives which are possible and which have at the same time in history been realized by mankind. The present ideal of *Bildung* is not prescriptive but descriptive, it is not closed but open. (23)

ened ontogenetic repeat of our cultural phylogenesis is no longer meaningful. The links in the evolution of this series of historical contexts, of which our cultural phylogenesis consists, have, after all, been broken apart. Everything has become contemporary, with the remarkable correlate, as Duby correctly observed, that everything has also become history. When history is reassembled in the present, this means that the present has taken on the stigma of the past. *Bildung* consequently requires the orientation on a compass that is rejected by postmodernism. We must not shape ourselves according to or in conformity with the past, but learn to play our cultural game with it. What this statement means in concrete terms was described by Rousseau for the separate individual in the following way in his *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire*: There is a

state of mind in which the mind finds a platform sufficiently solid for a complete repose and where it can take together its whole being without feeling the urge to recall the past or to anticipate the future; where time is nothing for it, where the present can last endlessly without suggesting its duration and without any trace of succession.³⁷ (my translation)

And Rousseau subsequently points out that such a way of dealing with time awakes a feeling of complete happiness in our lives—"un bonheur suffisant, parfait et plein, qui ne laisse dans l'âme aucun vide qu'elle sente le besoin de remplir." (A complete and satisfying sentiment of happiness that leaves in the soul no emptiness that the soul might wish to fill.)³⁸

History here is no longer the reconstruction of what has happened to us in the various phases of our lives, but a continuous playing with the memory of this. Remembrance itself has priority over what is remembered. Something similar is true for historical writing. The wild, greedy, and uncontrolled digging into the past, inspired by the desire to discover a past reality and reconstruct it scientifically, is no longer the historian's unquestioned task. We would do better to examine the result of a hundred and fifty years' digging more attentively and ask ourselves more often what all this adds up to. The time has come for us to *think* about the past, rather than *investigate* it.

So, a phase in historical writing has perhaps now begun in which meaning is more important than reconstruction and genesis, a phase in which historians attempt to discover the meaning of a number of fundamental conflicts in our past by emancipating them from their pastness and by

37. "état où l'âme trouve une assiette assez solide pour s'y reposer tout entière et rassemble là tout son être, sans avoir besoin de rappeler le passé ni d'enjamber sur l'avenir; où le temps ne soit rien pour elle, où le présent dure toujours sans néanmoins marquer sa durée et sans aucune trace de succession." (J. J. Rousseau, *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Paris, 1972, 101.)

38. Ibid.

demonstrating their contemporaneity. Let us look at a few examples. An insight such as Hegel's into the conflict between Socrates and the Athenian State may contradict in a thousand places what we now know about the Athens of about 400 B.C., but it will nevertheless not lose its force. A second example: What Foucault wrote about the close link between power and discourse aiming at truth or about the very curious relation between language and reality in the sixteenth century was attacked on factual grounds by many critics, but this does not mean that his conceptions have lost their fascination. I am not saying that historical truth and reliability are of no importance or are even obstacles on the road to a more meaningful historical writing. On the contrary; but examples like Hegel or Foucault show us—and this is why I chose them—that the metaphorical dimension in historical writing is more powerful than the literal or factual dimensions. The philological Wilamowitz, who tries to refute Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, is like someone who tries to overturn a train carriage single-handedly; criticizing metaphors on factual grounds is indeed an activity which is just as pointless as it is tasteless. Only metaphors "refute" metaphors.

And that brings me to my final remarks. As I have suggested, there is reason to assume that our relation to the past and our insight into it will in the future be of a metaphorical nature rather than a literal one. What I mean is this: The literal statement "this table is two meters long" directs our attention to a particular state of affairs outside language itself which is expressed by it. A metaphorical utterance such as "history is a tree without trunk"—to use an apt example—shifts the accent to what is happening between the mere words *history* and *tree without trunk*. In the postmodernist view, the focus is no longer on the past itself, but on the incongruity between present and past, between the language we presently use for speaking about the past and the past itself. There is no longer "one line running through history" to neutralize this incongruity. This explains the attention to the seemingly incongruous but surprising and hopefully even disturbing detail which Freud in his essay on the uncanny defined as "something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light"³⁹—in short, attention to everything which is meaningless and irrelevant precisely from the point of view of scientific historical writing.

Just as postmodernism since Nietzsche and Heidegger has criticized the whole so-called logocentric tradition in philosophy since Socrates and Plato—that is, the rationalistic faith that Reason will enable us to solve the secrets of reality—postmodernist historical writing also has a natural nostalgia for a pre-Socratic early history. The earliest historical writing of the

39. S. Freud, "The Uncanny," in Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Norms of Sigmund Freud XVII*, London, 1959, 241.

Greeks was epic; the Greeks told one another about the deeds of their ancestors in the past in narrative epics. The stories they told one another were not mutually exclusive, despite their contradicting each other, because they inspired, above all, ethical and aesthetic contemplation. Because war and political conflict stimulated a more profound social and political awareness and because the written word has much less tolerance for divergent traditions than the spoken word, the "logocentric" uniformization of the past was brought about by Hecataeus, Herodotus, and Thucydides.⁴⁰ With this, the young trunk of the tree of the past appeared above ground. I certainly do not mean to suggest that we should return to the days before Hecataeus. Here, too, it is a question of a metaphorical truth rather than a literal one. Postmodernism does not reject scientific historical writing, but only draws our attention to the modernists' vicious circle which would have us believe that nothing exists outside it. However, outside it is the whole domain of historical purpose and meaning.⁴¹

40. For their remarks on the origins of Greek historical consciousness, I am greatly indebted to Dr. J. Krul-Blok.

41. This essay has been the occasion for a debate between Professor P. Zagorin and me. See P. Zagorin, "Historiography and Postmodernism: Reconsideration," *History and Theory* 29 (1990): 263-275; F. R. Ankersmit, "Reply to Professor Zagorin," *History and Theory* 29 (1990): 275-297.

SEVEN

Historism and Postmodernism

A Phenomenology of Historical Experience

1. INTRODUCTION: HISTORISM AND POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is a great many things. It originates in the rejection of modernist architecture as exemplified by Bauhaus or by Le Corbusier.¹ A decade later this most elusive concept was used for referring to deconstructivist theories of literary criticism² and to so-called “antifoundationalist” conceptions in the philosophy of language and meaning.³ Over the same period we may witness the development of a postmodernist political philosophy attempting to deconstruct traditional notions of the political center and its periphery;⁴ postmodernist philosophy of culture, in its turn, rejoiced in the elimination of the border between high and low culture

1. See, for example, C. Jencks, *Postmodernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture*, London, 1987. Jencks even provides us with data for the final victory of postmodernist over modernist architecture. That date is 1972: the year in which the modernist Pruitt-Igoes building in St. Louis was blown up. “This explosion of 1972, copied countless times throughout the world as a radical dealing with such housing estates, soon came to symbolize the mythical death of Modern architecture.” See Jencks, *Postmodernism*, 27.

2. For a useful discussion of the relation between postmodernism and contemporary literary theory that goes beyond the all-too-easy equation of deconstructivism and postmodernism, see S. Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, Oxford, 1990, 103–132.

3. Apart from Richard Rorty’s writings since 1979, particularly useful are J. Rajchman and C. West, eds., *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, New York, 1985, and K. Baynes, J. Bohman, and T. McCarthy, eds., *Philosophy: End or Transformation?* Cambridge (MA), 1987.

4. See especially C. Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, Oxford, 1988, and idem., *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, Oxford, 1986.

and in the aestheticization of contemporary society.⁵ Lastly, postmodernist reflection on art—the domain where postmodernism has been most influential—took the form of a rejection of avant-gardism. Whereas almost every previous new development in nineteenth- and twentieth-century art began by proudly announcing itself to be the “modernist” avant-garde that would pitilessly condemn older styles to obsolescence, postmodernism struck another and quite different note by presenting itself as *not* being the latest attempt to overcome the history of art.⁶ The modernist avant-garde, by describing itself as the last and ultimate development in art, always firmly and confidently placed itself in a history of art; postmodernism, however, only carried on this tradition of contestation in a curiously paradoxical way by presenting itself as the first form of art that was *not* interested in locating itself in the history of art.⁷

But, as this postmodernist circumvention of the historical pretensions of the avant-garde already suggests, postmodernism is also a theory of and about history. It is a theory *of* history insofar as postmodernism claims to be the first historical period (since the modernist Enlightenment) to avoid periodization successfully.⁸ Next, as a theory *about* history, postmodernism is a theory rejecting the claims of so-called “metanarratives.” The *locus classicus* of the rejection of metanarrative is, of course, Lyotard’s *La Condition Postmoderne*. As everybody knows, this pamphlet has, for better or for worse (rather for worse than for better, I would say), acquired a central place in the discussion of the pros and cons of postmodernism. Within Lyotard’s presentation of metanarrative, its primary function, then, is to legitimate science. “Le savoir scientifique,” writes Lyotard, “ne peut savoir et faire savoir qu’il est le vrai savoir sans recourir à l’autre savoir, le récit.” (Scientific knowledge cannot justify its pretension to be true knowledge without having recourse to that other form of knowing, the story.)⁹ The legitimacy of science—that is, the answer to the question of why we are justified in placing our hopes and confidence in scientific progress—can only

5. This elimination is the main thesis of A. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, London, 1988.

6. P. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Minneapolis, 1984; see especially chap. 1.

7. Hence the eclecticism of postmodernism. Abandoning the notion of the avant-garde implies abandoning periodization. And abandoning periodization results in a tearing down of the barriers against eclecticism.

8. The paradox of a period presenting itself as the historical period that does not periodize is discussed in G. Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*, Cambridge, 1988, 4; B. Lang, “Postmodernism in Philosophy: Nostalgia for the Future, Waiting for the Present,” in A. J. Gascardi, ed., *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, Baltimore, 1987; A. Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, Berkeley, 1985; see, for example, 296ff.

9. J. F. Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne*, Paris, 1979, 50.

be proven by having recourse to the metanarratives of the *Bildungsroman* of the history of the human mind.¹⁰ Examples of Lyotard's metanarratives are: the story that the Enlightenment liked to tell itself about the liberating effects of the progress of scientific knowledge; the story of how such progress can foster the moral and spiritual formation of the nation; and, lastly, Marxism. According to Lyotard, these metanarratives have in recent times dissolved into an infinite number of *petits récits*, that is, of self-sufficient, "local" language games that are in use in the various scientific subsocieties that populate the contemporary intellectual world.¹¹ Henceforward an attempt to organize these social and cultural fragments into a larger and more comprehensive whole or to arrange them into a hierarchy is doomed to fail.¹² Thus, as a theory *about* history Lyotard's account is a criticism of customary conceptions of the fundamental *unity* of the past: the past is broken up by him into a number of disparate fragments and the fragmentation of the contemporary intellectual world is the mirror image of that dissolution of the past.

There are a number of oddities in Lyotard's deplorably sketchy tale of the life and death of metanarratives. First, it may strike one as strange that metanarratives should ever have claimed to "legitimate" science since ordinarily such claims belong to the domains of the epistemologist and the philosopher of science. Worse still, metanarratives were always a source of irritation to philosophers of science since they effected a historicization of science and thus gave rise to the particularly thorny problems of relativism. Metanarratives traditionally served rather to delegitimize science than to legitimize it. However, although Lyotard's own argument does not encourage such an interpretation,¹³ he may have had in mind a historical or social rather than an epistemological legitimation of science. However, Enlightenment modernism always argued the other way round. Modernists always saw scientific progress as the model and condition for social and political progress and to argue the other way round—as Lyotard does—they would condemn as a confusion of cause and effect.

Second, Lyotard is far from being the first to attack metanarrative. It will be obvious to anyone that Lyotard's metanarratives are identical to so-called speculative philosophies of history. Speculative philosophies of history, the kind of systems that were built by Hegel, Marx, Spengler, Toynbee, and many others, were fiercely criticized in the fifties by philosophers

10. Ibid.

11. Lyotard, *Condition*, 98.

12. Lyotard, *Condition*, 66.

13. Storytelling by the Cashinahua is for Lyotard paradigmatic of the social legitimation of knowledge through narrative. He ends his discussion of social legitimation by contrasting it with the kind of social legitimation we know in the West. See Lyotard, *Condition*, 42–43.

like Popper, Mandelbaum, and Hayek—a critique from which, despite several attempts to answer it, speculative philosophy of history has never recovered.¹⁴ It is frustrating that Lyotard restricts his clarification of why metanarratives have fallen into disrepute to the casual remark: “Ces recherches des causes sont toujours décevantes.” (These searches for causes are always disappointing.)¹⁵ Yet it would seem that a criticism along the lines of that of Popper and others would have been of little help to Lyotard. For their criticism always had the form of an argument proving that metanarratives fell short of criteria for scientific acceptability. Evidently *this* type of argument is not open to Lyotard since by making use of it he would entangle himself in the self-defeating strategy of a scientific argument for delegitimizing science. Admittedly, the position is not completely impossible since the legitimacy of science is still a different matter from science itself; nevertheless, the odor of the self-contradiction would remain in the air.

But there has been an older, even more effective and intellectually more interesting critique of metanarrative. I am thinking here of historicism, that immensely influential theory of historical thought that was developed at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century and that, despite the quasi-positivist disguise under which it now often hides itself, is still the major source of contemporary historical consciousness. When Lyotard writes that “le recours aux grands récits est exclu . . . , le ‘petit récit’ reste la forme par excellence comme validation du discours scientifique” (the return to metanarrative is not open to us . . . , the small narrative remains the best option for the justification of scientific discourse),¹⁶ this shift from the modernist “grand récit” to the post-modernist “petit récit” has its exact analogue in the historicist rejection of speculative historical systems like Hegel’s, a rejection which has become the hallmark of historicist historical thought. In a fragment in which Ranke rejects speculative philosophy (he had the Hegelian system in mind), it is said that the historian has two ways to acquire knowledge of human affairs. Such knowledge can be attained by abstraction (this is the philosopher’s method) or by focusing on what Goethe has called the “rebus particularibus.”¹⁷ The latter, the historian’s method, Ranke characterized as originating in “a feeling for and a joy in the particular in and by itself.” The general is only derivative, for the historian

14. Although the interest in and respect for speculative philosophy of history is certainly greater than a few decades ago, this has proved to be insufficient encouragement for the construction of new speculative systems.

15. Lyotard, *Condition*, 63.

16. Lyotard, *Condition*, 98.

17. Quoted in F. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, München, 1965, 468.

will not have preconceived ideas as does the philosopher, but rather while he observes the particular, the course which the development of the world in general has taken will be revealed to him. . . . He will try to comprehend all—also the kings under whom the generations have lived, the sequence of events, and the development of major enterprises—without any purpose other than joy in individual life, as one takes joy in flowers without thinking to which of Linné's classes or of Oken's families they belong; briefly put, without thinking how the whole appears in the particular.¹⁸

So what Lyotard refers to as our contemporary cultural predicament was already realized a long time ago in the world of historicist historical thought. And it is to historicism and historicists like Ranke that we owe this achievement of fragmenting the whole of history into independence entities or particulars. *History* gave way, to paraphrase Koselleck, to *histories*.

But if we can argue from postmodernism to historicism, the opposite route is open to us as well. Historicism was mainly a theory of so-called "historical forms" or "ideas." These forms or ideas embodied the unalienable individuality of historical epochs or phenomena. And they can only be known in terms of their differences: historical forms demonstrate their contours only insofar as they are distinct from each other and *not* in what is common to several or all of them. In so far as postmodernist theory can be seen as a set of variations of the Saussurian theme of "difference," we find here a first indication for how to argue from historicism to postmodernism. The historicist emphasis on difference was strongly reinforced by the historicist conviction that everything is what it is as a result of a historical evolution. The essence of a nation, people, or institution could be found in its past.¹⁹ Needless to say this intuition invited the historicist to define the *historical form* or *idea* of a people, nation, et cetera, in terms of its differences with what it was at an earlier or later phase. Differences in history result in differences in the essences of historical phenomena. Suppose now that we have one historical work for each historical phenomenon or period. In that case it seems natural to suppose that the differences between these historical works are taken to correspond to or reflect differences in historical forms or ideas insofar as these characterize historical reality *itself*. So far, so good. But suppose, next, that we have a great

18. G. G. Iggers and K. von Moltke, eds., *Leopold von Ranke, The Theory and Practice of History*, Indianapolis, 1973, 31.

19. Mandelbaum gives the following authoritative definition of histori(cism): "Historicism is the belief that an adequate understanding of the nature of any phenomenon and an adequate assessment of its value are to be gained through considering it in terms of the place which it occupied and the role which it played within a process of development." See M. Mandelbaum, *History, Man & Reason*, Baltimore, 1971, 42. For an exposition of other definitions of histori(cism) and their relationship to the one given by Mandelbaum, see my *Denken over geschiedenis: Een overzicht van geschiedfilosofische opvattingen*, Groningen, 1986, 174–177.

and ever-increasing number of competing historical interpretations for each historical period or phenomenon. It will then become impossible to tell mere differences in *interpretation* apart from differences in historical forms or ideas, insofar as these are part of historical reality *itself*. For we could only do this if we knew which interpretation was the “correct” account of a historical form or idea. However, precisely because of the ever-increasing number of interpretations, it becomes more and more difficult to have clear and definite ideas of what is the “correct” historical interpretation or the one that comes closest to that idea. To put it provocatively, the more high-quality interpretations we have, the more the ideal of the “correct” interpretation becomes compromised. To the extent, then, that it becomes ever more difficult to be confident about the “correct” interpretation (in order to prevent an all-too-premature surrender to relativism, I deliberately avoid saying that it has become impossible), we will be unable to distinguish between differences in historical reality (or historical forms or ideas) and mere differences in interpretation. And, since in accordance with historicist methodology, differences are what is at stake in our understanding of the past, we may expect that the distinction between the historical text and historical reality (both to be defined in terms of differences) will tend to get blurred. If, therefore, contemporary history has a scholarly production that dwarfs the total sum of all previous historical scholarship, both in quantity and in quality, we may expect a shift from historical reality itself (the natural focus of interest in the happy period of scarce historical scholarship) to the printed page.

But let me be clear about the nature of this shift. This is not a shift within some eternally valid epistemology for the writing of history. Rather, we have to do here with a disruption of epistemological standards themselves. One must conceive of epistemology as the most thorough and the most intelligent articulation of our cognitive prejudices—and as such, epistemology may at times serve an important cultural purpose. It is what one might call a psychoanalysis of science and of scientific practice. As such, epistemology is not so much a foundation as an interpretation of scientific practice and scientific prejudice, so that when practice and prejudices change for whatever reason, epistemology has no other choice than to follow and reflect such a change. Hence, if the dramatic increase in scholarly production one may observe in history over the last few decades suggests the emergence of a new regime in the relation between historical reality and its representation in historical writing, epistemology should not stubbornly resist this evolution as a deviance from what logic or commonsense requires, but should instead provide us with a more up-to-date “psychoanalysis” of the new state of mind of the historical discipline.

If considerations like these justify the expectation that the historicist’s fascination with difference will result in a gradual dissolution of the notion

of historical reality in times of historical overproduction and in a blurring of the distinction between reality and text, a *rapprochement* between historicism and postmodernism is most likely. For if there is one thing for which postmodernism is notorious in the contemporary intellectual world, it is undoubtedly postmodernism's problematization of the referent and its insistence upon deconstructing the modernist distinction between language and the world. Moreover, postmodernism relies just as much as history upon a logic of difference for its attack on the distinction between words and things. Postmodernist speculations about difference in many cases result in the thesis that "there is nothing outside the text" and in the textualism or lingualism which, in Rorty's opinion, is the contemporary equivalent of nineteenth-century idealism.²⁰ So if postmodernism, as presented by Lyotard, strongly reminds us of historicism, historicism in its turn possesses an innate talent for developing into postmodernism.

However, what clearly distinguishes the two is the *ease* with which they are prepared to problematize our conception of an objective (historical) reality in the manner we have just seen. One cannot, for example, doubt Ranke's robust confidence in the unproblematic existence of a past reality which is the object of historical research: "We merely observe one figure (*Gestalt*) arising side by side with another figure; life, side by side with life; effect, side by side with countereffect. Our task is to penetrate them to the bottom of their existence and to portray them with complete objectivity."²¹ What is in historicism merely a disquieting and paradoxical tendency—the subsumption of the historical world in language—is almost the postmodernist's point of departure. Obviously, we may expect that this tension between historicism and postmodernism will provide us with the best clue for drawing up an inventory of the similarities and the dissimilarities of historicism and postmodernism. Consequently, the question of the nature of historical reality and historical experience will be the main themes in the remainder of this essay. These notions are our best yardsticks for measuring the distance between historical reality and historical language.

2. POSTMODERNISM AND HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION

Historical writing claims to offer us a representation of historical reality. In view of this claim, *representation* is the notion in terms of which we can best formulate and analyze the kind of problems I referred to at the end of the last section. Obviously, these problems concern the relation between historical reality and its representation in the historical text. Since Baudril-

20. R. Rorty, "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism," in Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Brighton, 1982.

21. Iggers, *Leopold von Ranke*, 42.

lard's theory of the *simulacrum* is arguably the best developed postmodernist theory of representation, we find here our natural starting point. Baudrillard reminds us of Borges's story of the Emperor who wanted a map of his country so detailed and hence so large that the map in the end covered the whole of the Empire and became, in fact, a facsimile of the Empire itself. Because it is a facsimile, the map urges us to revise our intuitions about the relation between the represented and its representation: the representation is here, or at least tends to become, no less real than the represented itself. Thus reality itself tends to become a mere redundancy because of the presence of its representation(s). "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it," writes Baudrillard, "henceforth it is the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—it is the map that engenders the territory."²² The result is the generation of a *real* without origin in reality itself: a *hyperreal* as Baudrillard calls it and we witness therefore in the process "the desert of the real itself" (note the double meaning of the word *desert* referring both to a movement of desertion and to the result of this movement).²³ The obvious objection to Baudrillard's argument is, of course, that in Borges's story, reality or the territory itself can hardly be said to surrender its logical priority to its map-like representation. No territory, no map.

However, later on Baudrillard presents us with a model of the simulacrum that is more effective than the Imperial map in upsetting our commonsensical intuitions about representation. He reminds us of the Iconoclasts, whose "millennial struggle," as he assures us, "is still with us today."²⁴ The Iconoclasts were aware of the inclination of the believer to eliminate God himself and to recognize God's presence only in a disseminated form as embodied by the simulacra or images that have been made of Him. The believer worshipping God "through" his images will in the end transfer his devotion for God to the images that were intended only to "channel" her or his devotion. Here, indeed, the *precession of simulacra* is undeniably a historical and psychological fact and here we are truly justified in speaking of "the death of the divine referential."²⁵ The example also justifies the idea of a *hyperreality*, that is, of a reality that is "more real" than reality itself. For if the believer is apparently inclined to experience the image or simulacrum of God as ontologically prior to God Himself, God's *representation* has become "more real" than God Himself. Thus simulacra are substituted for reality, an inversion that will inevitably render inapplicable and futile our traditional notions of "truth, reference and ob-

22. J. Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, edited and with an introduction by Mark Poster, Cambridge, 1988, 166.

23. Ibid.

24. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 169.

25. Ibid.

jective causes";²⁶ 'hyperreality' and representation have driven out the represented or reality itself.²⁷ The important conclusion we may draw from Baudrillard's argument is that this seemingly so natural, incontestable order of the represented and representation founded on the distinction between the two can no longer be unproblematically upheld for all cases. Insofar as the notion of representation is dependent on this distinction and on the order of the represented and representation, we had better abandon it. Note, furthermore, that this "murder of reality"²⁸ is all the more surprising since—in contrast to the example of the Imperial map—the issue of mimesis, of what is a "good likeness" of God, has not even arisen. The spell of hyperreality is apparently so strong that it can afford a sovereign disregard for the issue of mimesis. This fact still further contributes to the primacy hyperreality apparently possesses over "divine" reality itself.

It might now be objected that Baudrillard's theory of the precession of the simulacra does indeed have a certain plausibility for the case of images of the Godhead, but that this is merely a speculation about the psychology of the believer which is a good deal less plausible for other instances of representation. Though I tend to agree with Baudrillard when he argues that the mechanisms that govern and explain the representation of the world in the modern media tend to dominate the represented, I believe that there is much truth in this objection. However, there is a domain in Western culture for which the thesis of the precession of the simulacra, as exemplified by the struggle of the Iconoclasts, possesses an immense plausibility. This is the domain of history and historical writing. For, as has been pointed out by constructivists and narrativist philosophers of history, historical reality itself is just as invisible to the eye as the God of the Iconoclast: we know it only in and by its representations. We have no previously given access to the reality described by Braudel in his *Méditerranée*, and we can say that, insofar as this reality has any life of its own, it owes this life to the simulacrum which Braudel has constructed of it. Certainly in *this* case the simulacrum precedes reality itself. Of that reality we can therefore say that it is as much "made" as "found," and the impossibility of distinguishing clearly and precisely between these two is not so much a thesis about the vagueness of the borderline between fiction and history (the fashionable interpretation of this state of affairs) as a questioning of the meaning of these words *themselves* if applied to historical writing. Thus the death or even "murder" of God has its exact analogue in the replacement of histori-

26. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 168.

27. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 170. For a roughly similar account of historical representation based on suggestions by Gombrich and Danto, see chap. 4 of this volume.

28. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 170.

cal reality by historiographical hyperreality as soon as we accept the constructivist's or the narrativist's ontological agnosticism. I am well-aware that we all feel a strong intuitive resistance to this demystification of historical reality: for what we are only too ready to do in the realm of theology, we are most reluctant to undertake for a domain of "scientific research," like the writing of history. We may therefore derive some comfort from the fact that for a domain of scientific research like psychology, a closely similar conception of reality has been proposed by no less an authority than Freud. In psychology, Freud wrote in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, psychic reality can be compared to the "virtual images" created by a microscope or binoculars: "Everything that can be an object of our internal perception is *virtual*, like the image produced in a telescope by the passage of light rays."²⁹ If we investigate psychic reality, we investigate a "virtual" reality, a reality of images or of simulacra and not a reality that is the supposed origin of these images or simulacra.

Under the present circumstances we can do either of two things. We may conclude from the mechanism of the simulacra and from the operation of that mechanism in the writing of history that we cannot properly speak of historical representation at all. For, the term *representation* requires the presence of an independently given (historical) reality which is, next, represented in and by historical writing. Consequently, as postmodernists often argue, the postmodernist notion of the simulacrum is essentially a going "beyond" or against representation.³⁰ And, in accordance with the postmodernist fascination with performance,³¹ one could at most say that historical writing offers us a *presentation* (instead of a *representation*) of the past. In opposition to this strategy, I prefer to see the theory of the historical simulacrum as a theory *of* rather than *against* representation. My main reason for this alternative strategy is that meaningful debate takes place in disciplines like historical writing and psychology. So, despite the death or "murder" of the epistemological God, and despite the replacement of historical reality by the postmodernist notion of historiographical hyperreality, we cannot reduce historical accounts to the arbitrariness of mere *presentations* of the past. To put it differently, in view of the possibility of historical debate, we ought to see the postmodernist notion of the his-

29. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, part 2, in Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, volume 5, London, 1953, 611.

30. Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, 212.

31. Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, 132–157; whether there really is a material difference between the modernist and the postmodernist views of representation can be doubted insofar as postmodernism could, perhaps, best be seen as modernism's self-awareness. This has been argued, for example, by Huyssen, *After Divide*, 209. The postmodernist's attack on representation could then best be interpreted as a *new* theory of representation. This, in fact, is my position.

historical simulacrum as a challenge to *clarify* the nature of historical representation rather than as too facile an injunction to *abandon* the concept of representation for the writing of history altogether. The example of historical writing urges us to penetrate deeper into the secrets of the phenomenon of representation, instead of surrendering it as soon as the notion no longer immediately satisfies our commonsensical conceptions of representation. Since postmodernism is so strongly affiliated with art and aesthetics—where the issue of the adequacy of representation is indeed less urgent than in historical writing—postmodernists have too easily abandoned the notion of representation.

Maintaining and adopting, then, the notion of representation, we may ask what features we should attribute to it in conformity with postmodernist patterns of argument. First, it has been pointed out, for example by Jameson, that *depthlessness* results if the distinction between reality and representation becomes blurred.³² The explanation is as follows: The traditional opposition of language and reality effects a duplication in both language and reality. This duplication is the result of the fact that: 1) this opposition is suggestive of a mimetic model of representation; and 2) mimetic representation always permits us to ask for the adequacy of representation (thus we saw in the previous paragraph that the possibility of meaningful historical debate seems to require the distinction between representation and the represented). If, then, representations can be rated according to their adequacy, the hierarchy of representations will have its counterpart in a corresponding hierarchization of represented reality itself. That is to say, what is “essential” in reality is accounted for in the more adequate representations, and what is merely contingent or “appearance” is accounted for in the less adequate ones. Hence, if we distinguish between language and reality, reality almost automatically will be structured into a foreground (what is essential) and a background (what is mere appearance) and an illusion of “depth” is thus created. This illusion of “depth” gives way to “depthlessness” and to the inapplicability of the distinction between the essence of reality and mere appearance as soon as the postmodernist simulacrum questions the traditional opposition between language and reality.

Furthermore, this argument has a peculiar implication for postmodernist art and aesthetics. Modernist art always distrusted (or even ridiculed) realist or naturalist art as a naive attempt to bridge the gap between the represented and its representation. For the modernist, the essence of reality was not where the realist painter believed to have found it. Because the postmodernist is no longer interested in this gap between

32. F. Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 58.

representation and the represented, it can afford to be indifferent with regard to the question of realism. Duchamp's *objets trouvés* and Warhol's Brillo boxes have situated themselves precisely in this gap and, by doing so, have rendered the problem of realist representation meaningless and beside the point. Similarly, the realist or even classicist tendencies of postmodern art³³ should not be interpreted as a return to premodernist forms of representation but rather as a rhetorical ploy to heap ridicule on the pathos of the modernist struggles with the problem of the representation of reality.

Second, and more important, postmodernist depthlessness undoes the unity that the past possessed under the regime of modernism. Modernist philosophers of history will agree that, at first sight, the past is a chaotic manifold. Yet, if we penetrate below that chaotic surface, we are able to discover the deep structures that give to the past its unity and coherence. Postmodernist depthlessness, however, shaves off those deep-lying layers of the past that give to it its unity—and past reality disintegrates into a myriad of self-sufficient fragments. Postmodernism functions within the matrix of the detail and its leading concepts therefore are, in Alan Liu's dithyrambic enumeration: "particularism, localism, regionalism, relative autonomism, incommensurabilism, accidentalism (or contingency), anecdotalism, historicism—and to draw attention to a set of curiously prominent Greek prefixes in the method—'micro-', 'hetero-' and 'poly-'ism."³⁴ The postmodernist historiography of the *microstorie*, of *Alltagsgeschichte*, and of large part of the history of mentalities is paradigmatic of this fascination of the postmodernist historian with the detail and the contingent.

As a conclusion to this section, we may note that there are indeed two significant resemblances between the historian and the postmodernist theories of the representation of historical reality. First, to the historian rejection of speculative philosophies of history embodying the unity of the past corresponds the postmodernist's depthlessness and the postmodernist's conviction that no principle of unity lies below the surface of reality. Second, in both cases the irresistible gravitational pull of the detail is felt, though this pull is undoubtedly stronger in the case of postmodernism than in that of historicism. For if historicism is not essentialist with regard to the past as a whole, it remains, unlike postmodernism, essentialist with regard to the details of the past that are investigated by the historian. But even at that level, the postmodernist will resist a hierarchization of past re-

33. One could think here of a number of painters discussed by Jencks, like James Valerio, Hockney, Erlebacher, or Roberts. See Jencks, *Postmodernism*, chaps. 3–6.

34. A. Liu, "Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail" *Representations* 32 (Fall 1990): 78.

ality into what is essential and circumstantial. Historism is, from this point of view, a kind of halfway house between the essentialism of speculative philosophies on the one hand and postmodernism on the other—a state of affairs we might characterize by saying that postmodernism is a consistent and radical historism that is no longer content to stop halfway.

But to see these resemblances is, at the same time, to see where the historian and postmodernist theories of historical reality and of historical representation differ. It is true that neither historism nor even postmodernism will or can deny that history is an empirical discipline in which historical reality, however conceived, is described or represented on the basis of empirical data. However, the historian notion of historical reality will present us with relatively few problems if we wish to explain how historical reality provides the historian with the relevant historical data. I emphatically do not want to say that an account of the origin of historical data and of historical experience will be easy to give for the historian case; I only say that it will cause less brain-racking problems for the historian than for the postmodernist. For, the postmodernist notion of the simulacrum and of historiographical hyperreality seems to leave no room whatsoever for the autonomy of historical reality and for an authentic historical experience of that reality. Here everything becomes construction. And it is here, therefore, that we encounter the truly profound difference between historism and postmodernism.

So the crucial difference between historism and postmodernism is to be sought in the role which both attribute to historical data and to historical experience. One should be clear, however, about the nature of the dispute. The historian and the postmodernist will agree that the historian studies his documents, reads his sources and his texts, and that these provide him with his data. At this, what one might call “phenomenological,” level any dispute about how the historian collects his data or about how he experiences the past would surely be quixotic. The dispute, however, concerns the philosophical *interpretation* of this state of affairs. Historists will interpret the historian’s procedure as an experience of an independently given historical reality; the postmodernist theorist of the simulacrum will have his doubts about the autonomy the historian attributes to past reality. Thus, the real dispute between the historian and the postmodernist concerns the nature of historical experience and the place of historical reality in the historian’s experience of the past. To put it succinctly, we may wonder whether the postmodernist theory of historical writing, unlike that of historism, still leaves room for the authenticity of historical experience. That is, for an authentic experience of the past in which the past can still assert its independence from historical writing. To that question, the question of the postmodernist theory of historical experience, we shall now turn.

3. THE POSTMODERNIST THEORY OF HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

Discussing historical experience, Gadamer writes in his *opus famosum*: "However paradoxical it may seem, the concept of historical experience seems to me one of the most obscure we have."³⁵ Indeed, historical experience has only seldom been investigated as such in philosophy of history. The explanation lies partly, it seems to me, in historical objectivism and in the peculiar form that this objectivism often took in historical thought. Objectivism required of the historian that he, in the famous words of Ranke, "efface himself," that he offer a "reenactment of the past" in his writing, from which the historian himself is as absent as possible. This objectivism made it difficult for the notion of historical experience to enter the scene of historical thought: these objectivist requirements seemed to leave no room at all for the very notion of the historian's experience of the past. For, the notion of historical experience inevitably requires the presence of a level (however defined) between the past itself and its adequate representation by the historian—and whatever happened at that level could only compromise the reliability of the latter. It might be added that, paradoxically, historical thought has always been even more "objectivist" than the philosophical reflection on science. For, despite the efforts of historicists and of a hermeneuticist like Dilthey (who attempted to do for history what Kant had achieved for the sciences), historical thought has always remained curiously satisfied with its pre-Kantian and preempiricist position. The "critique of experience," as we find it in eighteenth-century philosophy all the way down from Locke via Hume to Kant, has, in fact, simply no analogue in the history of historical thought. This absence of a critique of historical experience may explain why historical thought has always found itself without much defense against the textualist or idealist seductions as we find them (I would be the first to concede this point) in so much of contemporary postmodernist theory. Objectivism and textualism (or idealism) have been the two opposite extremes toward which historicist thought always naturally gravitated without ever being able to find a reasonable synthesis or golden mean between the two.

If historical experience is so much a neglected theme in traditional historical thought, this is, indeed, even truer of postmodernism. One of the criticisms we may justifiably make of postmodernism is that it focuses so much on textual presentation and feels so little inclined to consider closely modernist accounts of the experiential basis for what is expressed and presented by the (historical) text. Postmodernism is often accused of

35. H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming, New York, 1986, 310.

dismissing such an experiential basis as irrelevant; but instead of saying that postmodernism has a mistaken or cavalier notion of historical experience, it is better to say that it has, in fact, *no* theory of historical experience at all. Our present task of investigating the postmodernist theory of historical experience, therefore, puts us in the awkward position of first having to develop such a theory ourselves. Yet, such a theory must inevitably be outlined, however sketchily, for without it we shall be unable to map the differences and similarities of historicism and postmodernism. As the reader will recall, such was the conclusion of the previous section.

In answering the question of the postmodernist theory of historical experience, I shall boldly take my point of departure in our experience of our personal past as given in the nostalgic recollection of that past. Who does not know that intense nostalgic yearning we may sometimes feel for a certain atmosphere or for a specific remote part of our personal past? Surely, if we *do* effectively possess the capacity to experience the past in the truest sense of the word, it is the feeling of nostalgia that bears the clearest sign of such experience and is likely to be the most suitable point of departure for discovering the nature of that experience. It is interesting that we feel an immediate resistance to such a strategy with regard to historical experience. For we tend to believe that our collective past, the obvious object of historical experience, is generically different from our personal past, so that the latter could never provide us with clues for an understanding of the former. But especially in the kind of empiricist investigation in which we are presently engaged, that is, in fact, a strange and even unprecedented resistance. Think of the empiricist account of science. As is well-known, the empirical foundation of science was often identified with sensory perception, hence, with how we *as individuals* experience the objects given to sensory perception. Empiricism is individualist. It has no use for the notion of a supra-individual subject of experience, and if such a notion were ever to be appealed to, the empiricist would rather see it as a kind of shorthand for how a number of individual scientists, *as individuals*, experience empirical reality. If, then, sensory perception as it ought to be attributed to the individual's experience of (a personal) reality is wholly acceptable within an empiricist account of the sciences, why should we wish to be more ascetic in the case of historical experience? Why should history be the kind of subject matter that can only be experienced by a quasi-Hegelian transindividual subject? Arguments to that effect will inevitably presuppose what they attempt to prove: for, what "neutral" vantage point is there outside subject and subject matter, from which such arrogant claims could be made as to how, in historical writing, subject and subject matter ought to be constituted? Moreover, turning the argument around, we will not find it difficult to model different forms of historical consciousness or of historical practice after the experience of our

personal past: "Die geschichtliche Wissenschaften," as Gadamer aptly remarks, "denken nur weiter was in der Lebenserfahrung schon gedacht wird."³⁶ Here one may think of the quasi-psychoanalytical tendencies attributed by such widely different authors as Goethe and Habermas to the historicist conception of the past;³⁷ we can think of the "neurosis" of the scientific approaches of the past advocated in the fifties and the sixties, or of the teleological aspirations aiming at *Bildung* and self-realization that are so conspicuously present in Hegelian, Marxist, or nationalist conceptions of the past. I certainly do not wish to imply that *all* writing of history can be fitted within the matrix of our (nostalgic) experience of our personal past; the foregoing only intends to call for a momentary "willing suspension of disbelief" in the feasibility of the strategy which is advocated here.

It will be my thesis, then, that nostalgia and the nostalgic remembrance of the past give us the most intense and the most authentic experience of the past, and that, consequently, nostalgia is our most suitable matrix if we wish to map the similarities and the dissimilarities of the historicist and the postmodernist experience of the past. Taking nostalgia as our matrix for exploring historical experience, it will become clear in the course of this chapter that as far as historical experience is concerned, postmodernism can best be seen as a more sophisticated, and in any case, more consistent form of historicism. Against the background of nostalgia, historicism can be explained in terms of postmodernism, while the reverse does not hold. Besides, there is a more circumstantial reason for focusing on nostalgia. Contemporary discussions of nostalgia already suggest an elective affinity between nostalgia and the postmodernist attitude toward the past. Thus Shaw and Chase even go as far as saying that "some cultural critics have identified the whole experience of postmodernity as a kind of macronostalgia."³⁸ I hasten to add, though, that I certainly do not intend to sub-

36. Gadamer, *Truth*, 'The historical sciences only elaborate what is already thought in the experience of life' (my translation), 208.

37. I refer to Goethe's statement: "Geschichte schreiben ist eine Art, sich das Vergangene vom Halse zu schaffen." (Writing history is a way to get rid of the past.) Quoted in F. Wagner, *Geschichtswissenschaft*, München, 1966, 248. For Habermas, see J. Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, Frankfurt am Main, 1973, 262–300. Habermas explicitly makes the comparison in this volume of the psychoanalyst and the historian in the following passage: "Die Arbeit des Analytikers scheint sich zunächst mit der des Historikers zu decken; genauer, mit der des Archäologen, denn die Aufgabe besteht ja in der Rekonstruktion der Frühgeschichte des Patienten" (The task of the psychoanalyst seems to be the same as the historian's, or rather, the archaeologist's task, for the goal is a reconstruction of the early history of the patient) (282). Similar suggestions were made by Herbert Marcuse and Norman Brown.

38. M. Chase and C. Shaw, "The Dimensions of Nostalgia," in Chase and Shaw, eds., *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, Manchester, 1989, 15. See also the paragraph titled "The Nostalgia Mode" in Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 66–68. In his magnificent study of four testators of postmodernism, Megill devotes much attention to the role played by nostalgia in the work of the authors investigated by him. According to Megill, Heidegger is the most explicit of the

scribe to all the claims recently made by postmodernists concerning nostalgia and the way it manifests itself in contemporary culture.

The following stanzas from the poem "Einst und Jetzt," written by the Austrian romantic poet Nikolaus Lenau (1802–1850), will give us the matrix of nostalgic experience we are looking for:

Möchte wieder in die Gegend,
Wo ich einst selig war,
Wo ich lebte, wo ich träumte,
Meiner Jugend schönsten Jahr!

Also sehnt' ich in der Ferne
Nach der Heimath mir zurück,
Wähnend, in der alten Gegend
Finde sich das alte Glück.

Endlich ward mir nun beschieden
Wiederkehr in's traute Thal;
Doch es ist dem Heimgekehrten
Nicht zu Muth wie dazumal.

Wie man grüßet alte Freunde
Grüss ich manchen lieben Ort;
Doch im Herzen wird so schwer mir
Denn mein Liebste ist ja fort.³⁹

Lenau's poem presents us with what undoubtedly is the prototypical form of nostalgia: the nostalgic yearning for the lost days of one's childhood. Probably because childhood is both so clearly distinct from adult life and often endowed with the features of stability and fixity (I shall return to this in a moment), it functions as the favorite object of nostalgic experience. When considering the characteristics of nostalgia as expressed

four "prophets of extremity" about what nostalgia should mean to the philosopher. However, if for Heidegger the nostalgic return to our origins requires an "undoing" or *Destruktion* of the history of ontology, his conception of nostalgia differs from the one advocated here. In the present essay it is essential that in nostalgic experience both the past and the present are accepted as such; indeed, the present is the dominant partner in the relationship between the two. For Heidegger's conception of nostalgia, see A. Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, Berkeley, 1985; especially 120–125.

39. I wished I were again in the country, / Where I once was happy, / Where I lived and where I dreamt, / That most wonderful year of youth!

Thus I was longing from afar, / For childhood's native soil, / Expecting, that in the familiar setting / Childhood's bliss could be found again.

Finally it was given to me / To return to the valley of my youth; / But to him who comes back home / It is not as in the days of old.

As one greets old friends / So I greet many a dear place; / But my heart becomes so heavy / For what was dearest is lost forever. (my translation)

N. Lenau, *Sämtliche Werke in einem Bande: Herausgegeben von G. E. Barthel*, Leipzig, n.d., 21.

by Lenau's poem, we will first observe that nostalgia is intimately related to an awareness of displacement or of being displaced. The subject of nostalgic experience is painfully aware of being where and when she does *not* want to be. What naturally is the center of our experience and our existence—the present and the here and now—is suddenly relegated to the periphery. It should be added that nostalgic “displacement” can be both temporal and spatial in nature (in Lenau's poem we encounter a combination and mutual reinforcement of both these forms of nostalgic displacement). If, however, we trace back the history of nostalgic displacement to its origins, spatial displacement appears to be the older of the two. For, the neologism *nostalgia* (a composition of the Greek words *nosteo*—“to return home safely”—and *algos*—“pain”) was coined in 1688 in a learned dissertation by the German physician Johannes Hofer to describe the mental afflictions of Swiss mercenaries fighting far from their native country—afflictions that might even result in attempts at suicide.⁴⁰ It is tempting, though admittedly dangerous, to speculate on the causal relation existing between nostalgia and space and time, these two most fundamental categories of physical reality. Would it not follow that nostalgia provides us with a bridge between physical reality and the realm of emotion and feeling? Surely, many other feelings are causally related to aspects of physical reality. But the link between these other feelings and the objects that cause them ordinarily belong to the more contingent aspects of physical reality (e.g., pain, hunger, sexual arousal). Since nostalgia, on the contrary, is dependent upon these most fundamental categories of physical reality, we may perhaps believe that nostalgia must be a most “fundamental” feeling about our location in space and time, one which could possibly help us explain and hierarchize other more contingent feelings.

What most requires our attention in the present discussion is, however, the following. The main point Lenau wishes to make in the stanzas I quoted is that nostalgia always urges us to *undo* ‘displacement’ but without ever actually *succeeding* in achieving this goal (*Sehnsucht*, that untranslatable term of German romanticism, aptly sums up this combination of desire and frustration in which desire and the frustration of desire both presuppose and reinforce each other). For, contrary to the hopes and expectations of the poet, returning to the valleys where he spent his youth did *not* result in a satisfaction of nostalgic yearning. It did *not* realize for the poet the goal or motive of this return: an identification with the boy he had been so many years ago. If we consider the goal-means relationship of practical reasoning, nostalgia presents us with a goal that selects the means that can never realize the goal while, paradoxically, this seems to be precisely the goal of nostalgic *Sehnsucht*. This may remind one of Kant's

40. F. Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, New York, 1979, 1ff.

definition of aesthetic beauty as "Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck" (purposefulness without purpose), and that would justify us in attributing an aesthetic quality to the object of nostalgic desire.

At the same time we find here the crucial difference between the historian and the postmodernist; nostalgic experience of the past. The historian experience of the past aims at an identifying *Verstehen*, at a reliving of the past, an immersion in the past; for, the historian historical experience is to have, once again, the same experiences that do belong to the past itself (which, in fact, results in an elimination of historical experience since *past* experience can not be equated with an experience *of* the past). Historism and nineteenth-century hermeneutics, when striving for a revelation of "wie es eigentlich gewesen," for a Rankean "self-effacement" of the historian, aimed, therefore, at an elimination of historical experience in the proper sense of the word. The nostalgic experience of the past, on the contrary, by consistently upholding the unattainability of the past, respects the distance or difference that is necessary for the possibility of historical experience.

This distinction between the historian and the postmodernist experience of the past can be further detailed if we take into account the spectrum of emotions involved in nostalgia. Nostalgia, as is demonstrated by the stanzas quoted from Lenau's poem, is a strange mixture of happiness and disappointment. One speaks of nostalgia as "joy clouded with sadness" or of the "bitter-sweetness" of nostalgic yearning.⁴¹ Evidently, the feeling of joy or of sweetness is provoked by the magic of a past that we know we have irretrievably lost. Yet—and this is important—the feeling should not be related to an identification with, or a recapturing of, the object of nostalgic longing. Nostalgia is not a reliving of the past. This is already clear from the curious but often-cited fact that one may feel nostalgia for periods one objectively knows to have been periods of unhappiness; and why should we wish to relive an unhappy period in our personal past?⁴² Even more significant here is the feeling of bitterness that always accompanies the nostalgic experience of the past. For, what the latter feeling reflects is the unattainability of the object of nostalgic yearning; it originates in an

41. Davis, *Yearning*, 14, 27.

42. D. Lowenthal, "Nostalgia Tells It Like It Wasn't," in M. Chase and C. Shaw, eds., *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, Manchester, 1989, 19. The presentist bias Lowenthal attributes to nostalgia is in agreement with the view of nostalgia advocated here. See also D. Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, 1985, 4–13. Davis gives a similar account: "Some will, to be sure, allow that their nostalgia is tinged frequently with a certain sadness or even melancholy but are then inclined to describe it as 'a nice sort of sadness'—'bittersweet' is an apt word occasionally used." See Davis, *Yearning*, 14. Davis, for that matter, is no less insistent than Lowenthal about the presentism of the nostalgic past: the nostalgic past "is a past imbued with special qualities, which, moreover, acquires its significance from the particular way we juxtapose it to certain features of our present life" (Davis, *Yearning*, 13).

impotent awareness that we can never actually recapture or reabsorb the faraway object of nostalgic desire. The result is that nostalgia robs the object of nostalgic desire of the concrete existence that it did still possess in the historicist account of historical experience. The truth therefore is that what we experience historically in nostalgia is not "the past itself" (as conceived by the historicist), but the *difference* or the *distance* between the present and the past. The topic of Lenau's poem is not the childhood of the poet itself (as the historicist would read the poem) but the difference between "Einst und Jetzt," between the childhood and the present of the poet. Put differently—and from an opposite point of view—one might say that nostalgia gives us the *unity* of the past and the present: for, the experience of difference requires the simultaneous presence of what lies on both ends of the difference, that is, of both the past and the present. In the experience of difference, the past and the present are united. However, they are both present only in their *difference*—and it is this qualification that permits us to express the paradox of the unity of past and present. But in both cases, whether we prefer to see nostalgia as the experience of difference or as the unity of past and present, difference becomes central while the past and the present themselves are reduced to mere derivative phenomena. The past no longer is the "real" object it was for historicism. The "reality" experienced in nostalgia is difference itself and not what lies at the other side of the difference—that is, "the past" as such. The nostalgic experience of the past is not a kind of bridge permitting us to go back to a reified past itself. This fact about nostalgia has been well expressed by Lowenthal with the observation that "what we are nostalgic for is not the past as it was or even as we wish it were, but for the condition of having been."⁴³ This "having been" is the pure category of difference embodying the distinction between the historicist and the post-modernist experience of the past.

Further confirmation of this claim about nostalgic difference can be found in the topoi of *et in arcadia ego* and of the pastoral that for a long time in Western history have been the expression for social or collective nostalgia. What must strike us about these topoi is that they are completely—and deliberately—without historical content; they were, as such, the pure manifestations of difference and therefore ideally suited for expressing nostalgia. It is not surprising, then, that these old topoi of nostalgia silently but suddenly disappeared from the Western cultural repertoire with the advent of historicism.⁴⁴ For, historicism gave Western man an objectified, reified past. And by doing so, it absorbed the dimension of difference as embodied in the traditional topoi of nostalgia, in the by now rei-

43. Lowenthal, "Nostalgia," 29.

44. I owe this information to Dr. W. E. Krul.

fied past itself. Nostalgia, as an attitude toward the past, became suspect since its resistance to the reification of the past seemed to question and even to endanger historical truth. For what historical truth can there be if there is not a past "historical" object that historical truth is truth about? Hence, for example, Lasch's fierce condemnation of nostalgia: for Lasch, the nostalgic person merely is "an incurable sentimentalist afraid of the future" and no less "afraid to face the truth about the past."⁴⁵ This clearly is the historian's verdict for nostalgia.

Its propensity to objectify the past inspired in historism a love for a past which has the fixed and clearly articulated contours that physical objects typically possess. The historian past is a "clear and distinct" past and the historian is therefore above all interested in those features of the past that express or define this clarity and distinctness. Historist historical writing is a science of demarcations and of the distinction between foreground (the important) and background (the unimportant). Distinction and difference are for the historian, above all, distinction and difference within the past *itself*. Nostalgic difference, however, is paramountly a difference between past and present, and this effects a melting together of the clear lines and contours projected onto the past by historism: differences within the past itself yield to the differences between past and present. At the level of the experience of our personal past, this phenomenon has been described by Davis in the following way:

During the developmental transition from adolescence to adulthood it is, on the mundane plane of daily life, the anxieties, uncertainties, and feelings of strangeness about the present and future that constitute *figure* for the youth while *ground* is composed of familiar and likable persons, places, and identities from the past. "Without really changing a thing" (and thus sparing one's being self-accusations of distortion or falsification), the nostalgic reaction inverts the perspective: the warmly textured past of memory that was merely backdrop suddenly emerges as *figure* while the harshly etched silhouette of current concerns fades into *ground*.⁴⁶

This may explain the associations with a kind of Stoic, stable order that are often mobilized by nostalgia and where the nostalgically desired past seems to differ so conspicuously from the unpredictable vicissitudes of the present. The nostalgic past is largely a silent and static past inhospitable to the clear and forceful patterns of historical evolution that the historian always likes to discover in the past. The nostalgic past privileges background, stability, and the structures of stability at the expense of change and of what permits narrativization. Hence the interest in postmodernist historical writing for the insignificant and the contingent—or, rather for

45. Quoted in Lowenthal, "Nostalgia," 20.

46. Davis, *Yearning*, 58.

what is condemned by the historian as insignificant and contingent. Hence also the—at first sight—amazing coalescence in postmodernist historical writing of structuralism and a preoccupation with the apparently meaningless and redundant: both have their common origin in the emancipation of the background at the expense of the foreground.

In the foregoing I repeatedly moved from the nostalgic experience of our personal past to the domain of historical writing about times and places outside our personal experience. It has been my thesis that a historical experience of the past outside or before our personal past is possible. Two closely related objections can be formulated against this enlargement of the range of (nostalgic) historical experience. First, it may be argued that “the past which is the object of nostalgia must in some fashion be a personally experienced past”:⁴⁷ one does not feel a nostalgic desire for the childhood of somebody else. Second, one might object that nostalgia can never be a model for historical experience since *no* experience of the past, either nostalgic or otherwise, is ever possible. Experience, so the objection runs, is inevitably a matter of the present, so that an experience of the past is ruled out by the very meaning of the word *experience*. But this objection confuses experience *of* with experience *in*: surely all experience takes place *in* the present but it does not necessarily follow (unless some additional semantic provisions are made) that the possibility of an experience *of* the past is unthinkable because of that undeniable fact. Conceding this, our imaginary objector might now point out that the *object* of historical experience is, at most, the *evidence* the past has left us but not the past *itself*. Hence, the notion of a (nostalgic) experience of the past confuses the experience of evidence with the experience of what the evidence is evidence for. Yet, as everybody who has some personal acquaintance with the phenomenon of nostalgia will recognize, this distinction between evidence and what the evidence is evidence for is inappropriate in the case of nostalgia. For, nostalgia clearly has nothing to do with inferences on the basis of evidence; it really *is* an experience of the past—no more and no less. In view of this argument about the nature of nostalgia, the imaginary objector might now be willing to grant that we can, albeit in a slightly contaminated sense of the word, nostalgically experience the past in the sense of our experiencing *again* the same feelings we know to have had in a remote part of our personal past. To the extent that nostalgia is indeed successful in “copying” (or in “reliving”) these ancient feelings one might speak of an *experience of the past*.

Both objections have in common that they restrict the range of potential nostalgic experience to a past that we did actually experience before (at the time that it was present). This position can be further clarified by

47. Davis, *Yearning*, 8.

taking into account the obvious parallelism of nostalgia and memory. For is not nostalgia memory invested with a specific emotion? And, indeed, memory presents us with a picture roughly similar to the one we encountered in the previous paragraph. Nobody would object to the assertion that we remember something of our childhood. On the other hand, we cannot properly say that we *remember* the taking of the Bastille. We may say that we *know* that the Bastille was taken on July 14th, 1789, or that we “remember” this fact in the sense that a statement asserting that fact is stored in our memory, but since we were not present at the occasion itself, we could not say in the proper sense of the word that we *remember* the taking of the Bastille. It would be worthwhile therefore, in this context, to strictly distinguish between *remembering* and *remembering that*. The latter phrase is merely synonymous with *knowing that*, while what is known is either an event in the past or a fact we have learned about the past. But in both these cases *remembering that* lacks the associations with experience and feeling that are undoubtedly part of *remembering* in the former sense. Since nostalgia was defined a moment ago as memory invested with feeling, nostalgia is semantically related to *remembering* and not to *remembering that*. If, then, together with remembering, nostalgia remains firmly locked within the narrow limits of the experience of our personal past, the conclusion follows that nostalgia is an unsuitable model for the historian’s experience of the past.

Against these two objections it can be pointed out, first, that it would be quixotic to deny the all-too-evident nostalgia in, for example, Petrarch’s or Hölderlin’s fascination with classical antiquity, in Ruskin’s or Viollet-le-Duc’s idealization of the Middle Ages, or in Michelet’s exaltation of the great Revolution (to which I shall shortly return).⁴⁸ Feeling a nostalgic yearning for a historical period antedating our birth by many centuries is a fairly common phenomenon both for historians and nonhistorians. And one must not forget that Braudel’s *Méditerranée*, which is often regarded as the highest achievement of twentieth-century historical writing begins with the openly nostalgic declaration: “J’ai passionément aimé la Médi-

48. Exemplary for nostalgic longing for a remote past is the last stanza from Hölderlin’s “Griechenland”:

Mich verlangt ins bessere Land hinüber,
Nach Alcäus und Anakreon,
Und ich schlief’ im engen Hause lieber
Bei den Heiligen in Marathon;
Ach! es sei die letzte meiner Tränen,
Bei dem heil’gen Griechenlande rann;
Lasst, o Parzen, lasst die Schere tönen,
Denn mein Herz gehört den Toten an!

(F. Hölderlin, *Ausgewählte Werke*, Köln, n.d., 251.)

terranée." Next, it will be noted that if the objections formulated above against the nostalgic experience of the past are accepted, the corollary is hard to avoid that *no* experience of the past (nostalgic or otherwise) is possible *at all*. And that would certainly imply a most counterintuitive characteristic of a self-professed empirical discipline like the writing of history.

Yet, it may still be argued that an unprejudiced view of nostalgia relentlessly requires us to reject as mere delusion the conviction of authenticity that ordinarily accompanies the nostalgic experience of a faraway past. And, indeed, this resistance to the nostalgic experience of a remote past certainly is appropriate if we accept the historicist (or positivist) objectification of the past. If the past is seen as an object (or totality of objects), albeit immensely complex, *then* these object(s) inevitably belong to the past and *then* historical evidence truly is the sole, but disappointing, candidate for the role of the object of historical experience. When Gadamer observes, as we saw at the beginning of this section, that historical experience is a much neglected topic in historical theory, this undoubtedly has its explanation in the fact that, from a historicist or positivist (or even from a constructivist or narrativist) point of view, the notion of historical experience is hard, if not impossible, to make sense of. However, if the nostalgic experience of the past is understood as an experience of *difference*—and not of a past object lying at the other side of the difference between the past and the present—we get a different picture. For historical experience, as the experience of difference, dispenses with the (historist or positivist) postulate of the past as a kind of fixed object that is paradoxically forever outside the range of our potential experience and of which experiential knowledge is therefore *sui generis* impossible. This is precisely the lesson that is taught to us by Lenau's poem: nostalgic remembrance is in Lenau's poem an authentic encounter with the past permitting us to have an authentic experience of our (personal) past, and yet this does not presuppose that the past is made present again in some way or another (so that it can be experienced as a contemporary facsimile of the past).

On the contrary, all the interest of the nostalgic experience of the past lies in the fact that nostalgia is *not* a "re-enactment of the past." And if this is true, our *personal*, nostalgically remembered past is not categorically different from a past that is either a *collective* past or a past of several centuries ago—or even both at the same time. Nostalgia is not suggestive of the historicist or positivist notion of a past "as such" and of the reification of the past into a strange kind of object that is part of the inventory of a world antedating ours. Indeed, for the historicist or the positivist, the nostalgic experience of the past is an inexplicable mystery, so the kind of experience that it gives will necessarily be seen as a delusion by them. But the nostalgic experience of the past is not a *problem* that we should try to explain with the help of historicist or positivist assumptions with regard to the

relationship between past and present: it is a *datum* that we should exploit as much as possible in order to deepen our insight into our relationship to the past. To put it differently, we must avoid trying to fit the nostalgic experience of the past within the historicist or positivist conception of the past—for in that case the phenomenon of the nostalgic remembrance of the past is only confusing. The value of nostalgia lies precisely in the fact that it effectively questions historicist and positivist assumptions and, by doing so, extends the range of (potential) historical experience in a way that was hitherto inconceivable. In short, as soon as we have abandoned historicism and positivism and see historical experience in terms of the nostalgic experience of difference, there are no insurmountable obstacles to the notion of the historical experience of a remote and collective past. It is here, then, that we encounter the contribution of the notion of nostalgia to historical thought. If the notion of nostalgia is consistently purged of its associations with sentimentalism and with a spurious idealization (i.e., reification!) of the past it will be a most useful and welcome instrument for clarifying our understanding of the past and of how we experience it.

Within the matrix of the nostalgic experience of the past, we can further develop the similarities and the differences between historicism and postmodernism. It is true that when historicism rejected the ahistorical world view of the seventeenth century, of rationalist natural law theory, this rejection was mainly motivated by an acute awareness of the difference between historical periods. In his so-called *Ideenlehre*, Humboldt had argued that each historical period possesses its own *historical idea* which embodies its differences from other periods. However, if we bear in mind the matrix of the nostalgic experience of the past, historicism sought to reify each of these historical periods and, by doing so, to present them as objects of historical experience.⁴⁹ One may think here of Ranke's well-known statement: "But I assert, every epoch is immediate to God, and its worth is not at all in what derives from it *but rests in its own existence* (my emphasis), in its own self."⁵⁰ Thanks to this tendency to reify the past, historicist historical practice at times suggested an intellectual mentality coming quite close to that of positivism.⁵¹ The paradox of a philosophy of history that is so com-

49. W. von Humboldt, "On the Historian's Task," in G. G. Iggers and K. von Moltke, eds., *Leopold von Ranke: The Theory and Practice of History*, New York, 1973, 22.

50. L. von Ranke, "On Progress in History," in G. G. Iggers and K. von Moltke, eds., *Leopold von Ranke: The Theory and Practice of History*, New York, 1973, 53.

51. In the practice of nineteenth-century historical writing, historicism gradually degenerated into a quasi-positivist theory emphasizing a respect for very detailed historical studies which kept as close as possible to historical evidence. The evolution from historicism to positivism is exemplified in the scholarly career of the Dutch historian Robert Fruin (1823–1899). See J. Tollebeek, *De toga van Fruin: Denken over geschiedenis in Nederland sinds 1860*, Amsterdam, 1990, 16–56.

pletely dependent upon the hypothesis of difference but that is nevertheless reluctant to grant difference the role it ought to play, can, at least partially, be explained by the historicist ideal of *Universalgeschichte* ("Universal history") that lingered on in historicist historical thought for most of the nineteenth century. *Universalgeschichte* was seen as the context of contexts within which all the elements of the past could be integrated and given their logical or historical place. As such, *Universalgeschichte* had a double function. First, it was suggestive of that fixed logical or historical place of all historical elements and so functioned as a standing invitation to reify the past. Second, *Universalgeschichte* indeed epitomized all the relevant differences between historical periods—and between the present and the past—but it gave to the recognition of difference the status of a pious afterthought that had no significance for historical practice whatsoever. *Universalgeschichte* thus became a storehouse in which the paradoxes and inconsistencies of historicism could be conveniently put out of sight so that they could no longer hinder historicist historical theory and practice.

From the point of view of the historicist reification of the past, the post-modernist experience of (nostalgic) difference will be labeled as either the experience of the reality of unreality or the experience of the unreality of reality. For the historicist the (nostalgic) experience of the past must therefore have an air of mystique and almost religious revelation. Such indeed appears to be the case if we consider how a historicist such as Friedrich Meinecke discusses the nostalgic experience of the past. Meinecke quotes a passage from Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in which Goethe describes an experience of the past that is completely in agreement with what has been said up till now about the nostalgic experience of the past. Referring to a most intense experience of the past he had had when visiting Strasbourg Cathedral and, in the same year, 1774, the venerable home of an old patrician family, Goethe writes:

A feeling that overwhelmed me more and more, and that I hardly succeeded in expressing, was the experience of the past and the present as one: an experience that brought something spectral into the present. The feeling is expressed in many of my larger and smaller works and always worked out satisfactorily in poetry, though the feeling had to appear as inexplicable and perhaps even as disagreeable each time as it presented itself in life itself. (my translation)⁵²

52. "Ein Gefühl aber das bei mir gewaltig überhand nahm und sich nicht wundersam genug äussern konnte, war die Empfindung der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in Eins: eine Anschauung, die etwas Gespenstermässiges in die Gegenwart brachte. Sie ist in vielen meiner grösseren und kleineren Arbeiten ausgedrückt, und wirkt im Gedicht immer wohltätig, ob sie gleich im Augenblick, wo sie sich unmittelbar am Leben und im Leben selbst ausdrückte, jederman seltsam, unerklärlich, vielleicht unerfreulich scheinen musste" (quoted in F. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, München, 1965, 463).

Obviously, the experience of the unity of past and present recorded by Goethe is an experience of the difference between the two that can only be experienced in this momentary union (we noted this relationship a moment ago). The historian Meinecke is profoundly struck by Goethe's historical experience: "one's heart misses a beat upon reading these really most remarkable words." And he goes on to emphasize that Goethe's remark does indeed bring us to "the deepest problems of historicism."⁵³ Nevertheless, Meinecke's own clarification of Goethe's historical experience is paradigmatic of historicism—and of historicism's shortcomings. For, in Meinecke's view, the unity of past and present as experienced by Goethe "tore the poet away to a higher atmosphere in which, now held, he floated above all historical epochs" (my translation).⁵⁴ We can observe here in Meinecke's analysis the time-honored historian reflex to project the differences between past and present on the scale of *Universalgeschichte*. The unity of past and present, in which their difference from one another is experienced, is now seen from a transhistorical perspective and its concreteness is neutralized into a timeless insight. What distinguished Goethe's experience of the past from that of the historian—the prominence in it of the present—is relegated to the background again by Meinecke's appeal to the transhistorical dimension of *Universalgeschichte*.

It will be helpful to compare Meinecke's analysis to the account given by Huizinga—another self-professed historian—of what he referred to as historical sensation. We shall see that Huizinga comes closer to a postmodernist account of historical experience than Meinecke. For, Huizinga explicitly underlines the role of the present in historical sensation when he contrasts historical sensation with that loss of the historical subject in the past that is traditionally associated with the doctrine of *Nacherleben*.⁵⁵ Instead, Huizinga argues, historical sensation ought to be compared to our understanding of music. A most appropriate comparison if we recall Lévi-Strauss's characterization of music as "instrumental for the obliteration of

53. Ibid.: "es kann einem bei diesen indertat seltsamen Worten einen Augenblick das Herz stille stehen . . . Dieses 'Eins' aber führt nun überhaupt in die tiefsten Problemen des Historismus" (my translation).

54. "Entrückte den Dichter in eine höhere Sphäre, in der er nun ergriffen, über den Zeiten schwebend, weilte" (Meinecke, *Entstehung*, 465).

55. J. Huizinga, *Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance: Essays by Johan Huizinga*, trans. J. S. Holmes and H. van Marle, Princeton, 1984, 54. For a discussion of Huizinga's conception of historical sensation, see the excellent dissertation on Huizinga by W. E. Krul, *Historicus tegen de tijd: Opstellen over leven en werk van J. Huizinga*, Groningen, 1990, 230ff.; and F. W. N. Hugenholtz, "Huizinga's historische sensatie als onderdeel van het interpretatieproces," *Forum der Letteren* XX (1979): 398–404. The latter discussion is disappointing.

I want to thank Dr Krul for his help in this part of my argument. See also my, *De Historische Ervaring*, Groningen, 1993.

time.”⁵⁶ A melody is only heard or understood if the differences in sound and pitch are heard *together* in a movement, which is analogous to what happens in the nostalgic experience of the past.

Historical sensation, Huizinga continues, is not “an aesthetic enjoyment, a religious emotion, an awe of nature, a metaphysical recognition—and yet it is a figure in this series.” It may be evoked “by a line from a document or chronicle, by a print, by a few notes from an old song.”⁵⁷ It is the momentary dizzying experience of sudden obliteration of the rift between present and past, an experience in which the past for a fractional moment reveals itself “as it is, or was.” But this *as it is* is not the historian’s *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, but the past invested with *difference*. The latter, crucial assertion is clarified by Huizinga when he writes that the object of historical sensation is not something the author of a book has *himself* placed in a remote past in that book. On the contrary, as Huizinga recognizes, the present-day historian “*brings* it to the author; it is his *response* to the writer’s [that is, the author’s] call” (my emphasis).⁵⁸ Once again, the feeling of complete authenticity that accompanies historical experience and historical sensation is not the experience of an event or object in the past, similar to how we may experience the objects that are given to us in daily life, but an experience in which *both* the past *and* the present have their role to play. Huizinga proposes here, in fact, what we have learned to see as the postmodernist view of historical experience.⁵⁹

56. C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to the Science of Mythology*, New York, 1969, 16.

57. Huizinga, *Men and Ideas*, 54.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Since my argument here is strongly dependent upon the views expounded by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, it may be worthwhile—or even my duty—to define my own position with regard to Gadamer’s conception of historical experience.

As far as essentials are concerned—the thesis of the historicity of historical experience—Gadamer’s position and the one advocated here are identical. I heartily agree with Gadamer when he observes: “It is, in fact, the main lack in the theory of experience hitherto—and this includes Dilthey himself—that it has been entirely orientated towards science and hence takes no account of the inner historicity of experience” (Gadamer, *Truth*, 310–311). Historical experience is historical, not simply because the past is the object of historical experience but also because historical experience is itself part of a history. For as Gadamer demonstrates—having in mind nineteenth-century historians and hermeneuticists, with the possible exception of Droysen—it is very well possible and even tempting to sustain ahistorical, transcendentalist accounts of how we must conceive of historical experience in the historical discipline. To historicize historical experience requires a historicization of the transcendental “distance” between the historian and the object of historical experience. Gadamer achieved this historicization predominantly with the help of his concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* that will be discussed in the next paragraph of this chapter.

Yet, from this point Gadamer’s path and mine diverge, mainly because the domain of historical writing that is at stake in this discussion—the history of mentalities—differs from the

Most notable in Goethe's and Huizinga's accounts is the distinctly episodic character of historical experience. Both Goethe's and Huizinga's recollections of their historical sensations suggest a sense of being suddenly overwhelmed by the past's self-revelation. Nostalgia can once more be of help if we wish to develop the consequences of this episodic character of historical experience. We must observe that the events in our personal history that may trigger a nostalgic yearning are only rarely, and certainly not necessarily, the kind of events we hold to be of great significance in the story of our life. Thus we may nostalgically recall a certain atmosphere at a quite specific moment in our parental home or a holiday with our family; but we will seldom have nostalgic memories of having passed a particular examination or of having been promoted to a more responsible position. And yet, it is events of the latter kind that make up the narrative story of our life and constitute the items for our *curriculum vitae* or of the memoirs of an elderly statesman. Narrative coherence may guarantee the easiest access to the past but it obscures the authenticity of our experience of it. What has been appropriated and mastered narratively is no longer accessible to historical experience.

one Gadamer has in mind. I have no wish to disagree with what Gadamer writes about the place and function of hermeneutics in, for example, intellectual history and the history of philosophy.

However, with regard to the domain of the history of mentalities, my argument differs from Gadamer's in the matter of the relationship between the historian, the object of historical experience, and how the "distance" between the two ought to be historicized. Gadamer discusses at some length Hegel's account of experience, and though he feigns a certain aloofness from Hegel's account—"Hegel's dialectical description of experience has *some* [my emphasis] truth" (Gadamer, *Truth*, 318)—it seems to me that there is no real, or at least no fundamental disagreement between Hegel and Gadamer from our present perspective. For Hegel, experience is our means for "appropriating" the world and for making it part of ourselves and our identity: *Erfahrung* is the crucial factor in the process of *Bildung*, the process by which we articulate our personality and our identity. Thus, Gadamer approvingly quotes Hegel as follows: "The principle of experience contains the infinitely important element that in order to accept a content as true, the man himself must be present or, more precisely, he must find the content in unity and combined with the certainty of himself," and he adds the following comment: "The concept of experience means precisely this, that this kind of unity is first established. This is the reversal of the direction that consciousness undergoes when it recognizes itself in what is alien and different" (Gadamer, *Truth*, 318). And in the remainder of his exposition, Gadamer makes no attempts to question this aspect of Hegel's account of experience.

As will become clear at the end of this essay, my view of historical experience and of the object of historical experience is, in fact, the exact opposite of Gadamer's (and Hegel's). The object of historical experience, for me, is the experience of what used to be part of ourselves but has become strange, alien, or defamiliarized. Historical experience, in this essay, is *not* (as is the case with Gadamer) an attempt to "appropriate" the world, to demonstrate the world so that we can feel at home in it. For me, the past and the object of historical experi-

Two conclusions can be drawn from this thesis of the episodic character of historical experience. First, insofar as historical writing wishes to remain as true as possible to the episodic character of historical experience, it will necessarily repeat at the level of historical representation the features of the fragmented, the contingent, and the isolated. No doubt the *microstorie*, the history of mentalities, and *Alltagsgeschichte*, with its interest in the insignificant details of daily life, best satisfy these requirements within the compass of postmodernist historiography. And this is no mere antiquarianism. For the "fetishistic appropriation of objects" that Bann sees as characteristic of antiquarianism presupposes that the past is given to us in the form of autonomous objects and this reflects the *historist's* tendency to reify the past rather than the *postmodernist's* preference for the elusive difference between past and present.⁶⁰ Second, the matrix of nostalgia may make us aware of what is misleading in Paul Ricoeur's and David Carr's account of historical narrative. According to Ricoeur and Carr, all of our life and all of history is permeated by narrative.⁶¹ Their argument is that all our actions and all our deliberations preceding action take place in a thoroughly narrativized world. However, the opposition we observed a mo-

ence, at least in the history of mentalities, only comes into being when a part of ourselves or of our cultural identity takes on an independence of its own and, thus, can be objectified historically. The movement is not a movement *toward* the Hegelian absolute spirit, but precisely a *dissolution* of the absolute spirit.

And there is a second difference. Later on in his book Gadamer writes: "The hermeneutical experience is concerned with what has been transmitted in tradition. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that we learn to know and be in command of through experience; it is language, ie it expresses itself like a 'Thou'" (Gadamer, *Truth*, 320); the textualism of this statement is further reinforced by the observation: "everything written is, in fact, in a special way the object of hermeneutics" (Gadamer, *Truth*, 356). For Gadamer, language and text are the natural objects of historical experience. The explanation provided by Gadamer himself is that the historian encounters the past most often in the form of written texts (books, inscriptions, documents) (Gadamer, *Truth*, 352). Naturally, all this results in a textualization of the past. But the argument need not be convincing in all cases. Surely, in the fields of intellectual history and the history of philosophy Gadamer's textualization of the past seems defensible. However, if we think of Goethe's and Huizinga's historical experience (and of what must have occasioned these experiences), it will be obvious that we go beyond the domain of the written word here. Moreover, in this paragraph, historical experience was related to nostalgia as the prototype of an authentic experience of the past. And the nostalgic experience of the past is only contingently related to language and writing. See also my "Enkele inleidende opmerkingen over tekst en context in de geschiedbeoefening," *Groniek* 115 (1992): 7-23.

60. S. Bann, "Clio in Part: On Antiquarianism and the Historical Fragment," in Bann, *The Inventions of History*, Manchester, 1990, 120. I commented on the fetishism of historicism in F. R. Ankersmit, "Historische representativiteit," in Ankersmit, *De navel van de geschiedenis*, Groningen, 1990, 220ff.

61. P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Chicago, 1983; D. Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, Bloomington, 1986.

ment ago between the isolated event, that is the object of historical experience, and the coherence of narrative indicates that the rule of narrative is not universal. There is an attitude toward the past that is not only free from, but even inimical toward narrative.

The latter claim can be clarified when we take a look at Michelet. For, Michelet is at the same time the greatest narrator and the most nostalgic of nineteenth-century historians—and perhaps even of all modern historians. Michelet “‘revit,’ ‘refait’ et ‘souffre’ la Révolution”⁶² in narrating its history and therefore invested more in narrative than any other historian since it was his sole means for “reliving” and “remaking” that most glorious part of French history. And for Michelet’s nostalgic yearning for the French Revolution we only have to read the 1847 preface where Michelet depicts himself sitting on the windy plane of the Champ de Mars and musing about the enthusiasm and almost religious fervor of the revolutionary feasts that took place there fifty-seven years before:

You are alive! . . . I feel it, each time when in this part of the year my teaching leaves me to myself, when work weighs heavily upon me, when the summer heat becomes oppressive. . . . Then I go to the Champ de Mars, it is the only monument that the Revolution has left. . . . The Empire has its column and has almost appropriated to itself alone the Arc de Triomphe; the Kingdom has its Louvre, its Invalides; the feudal cathedral of 1200 still has its throne at Notre Dame; it is only the Romans, who only have the thermae of Caesar. And the Revolution has as its monument . . . emptiness . . . (my translation)⁶³

All the bitterness and sweetness of the nostalgic longing for a forever-unattainable past are present here. And almost every page of the *Histoire de la Révolution Française* testifies to Michelet’s continuous awareness of the “difference” between a decrepit present and those glorious days of the great Revolution he so much wanted to experience and to relive as a part of his own life. But it is an impossible striving, as he himself realizes at those very moments when he comes closest to it:

I lost my father with whom I had lived all my life, for forty-eight years. When that happened to me, I looked around myself, I was elsewhere, I hastily finished this work that I had dreamt of for such a long time. I was standing

62. J. Michelet, *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, vol. 1, Paris, 1952, xxi.

63. Tu vis! . . . Je le sens, chaque fois qu’à cette époque de l’année mon enseignement me laisse, et le travail pèse, et la saison s’alourdit. . . . Alors je vais au Champ de Mars, voilà le seul monument qu’a laissé la Révolution. . . . L’Empire a sa colonne, et il a pris presque à lui seul l’Arc de Triomphe; la royauté a son Louvre, ses Invalides; la féodale église de 1200 trône encore à Notre-Dame; il n’est pas jusqu’aux Romains, qui n’aient les Thermes de César. Et la Révolution a pour monument . . . le vide . . . (J. Michelet, *Histoire*, 1.)

below the Bastille, I took the fortress, I placed on its towers the immortal flag. . . . This blow came to me, unforeseen, like a bullet from the Bastille. (my translation)⁶⁴

Precisely at the moment when the past became almost as real as a "balle de la Bastille," the past sent him back to the present; having come closer to a "resurrection" of the past than ever before, he is thrown back again into the desolation of the present.

In accordance with what was just said about the episodic character of the nostalgic experience of the past, we may expect that Michelet will feel tempted to yield to the urge to exclude the Revolution from the majestic flow of his narrative of French history. In a brilliant analysis of Michelet's historical writing, Gossman has recently shown this expectation to be correct. For Michelet, according to Gossman, the narratable past essentially consists of the many *obstacles* that had to be overcome (all through the centuries) before the Revolution could actually materialize. As a result, the Revolution—during which these obstacles had *eo ipso* been temporarily vanquished—is *itself* outside the narratable past and no longer part of the concatenation of events that make up French history. The French Revolution, this object of Michelet's nostalgic longing, is thus isolated from the narratable course of (French) history.⁶⁵ Moreover, Michelet was himself well aware that his account transfigured the Revolution into a historical phenomenon of a different order. Discussing the "fête de fédération," to which I referred a moment ago, and which was for Michelet the very acme of the Revolution, he exclaims: "strange *vita nuova*, that commences for France, eminently spiritual, and that transforms its whole Revolution into a kind of dream, sometimes ravishing, sometimes terrible. . . . It has ignored space and time."⁶⁶ The Revolution takes here the features of a sublime event, both beautiful and terrifying, lying outside space and time, hence outside the domain of what can be narrated, and detached from the signifying chain embodying the coherence of the narratable past. Time and space have thus been overcome in Michelet's nostalgic experiences of the revolutionary past.

64. J'ai perdu mon père, avec qui j'avais vécu toute ma vie, quarante-huit années. Lorsque cela m'est arrivé, je regardais, j'étais ailleurs, je réalisais à la hâte, cette oeuvre si longtemps rêvée. J'étais au pied de la Bastille, je prenais la forteresse, j'arborais sur les tours l'immortel drapeau. . . . Ce coup m'est venu, imprévu, comme une balle de la Bastille. (Michelet, *Histoire*, 8.)

65. L. Gossman, "Michelet's Gospel of Revolution," in Gossman, *Between History and Literature*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1990, 212.

66. "Étrange *vita nuova*, qui commence pour la France, éminemment spirituelle, et qui fait de toute sa Révolution une sorte de rêve, tantôt ravissant, tantôt terrible. . . . Elle a ignoré l'espace et le temps" (Michelet, *Histoire*, 406).

4. EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology traditionally investigates the problem of how, in the words of Rorty, "language hooks onto the world" and, hence, of what the conditions are for the possibility of reliable and objective knowledge. If we know how words formally relate to things, we possess in that knowledge the most general criteria for reliable knowledge. I want to begin this discussion of a comparison of historicism and postmodernism from the point of view of epistemology with a somewhat unusual claim, namely the claim that all epistemology is inherently metaphorical. Let me try to clarify this claim with the help of an example. If we consider the metaphor "the heart is a pump," the metaphor is not a breach of the conventions for the use of literal language, nor a well-considered proposal for changing the name of a specific type of object (in the way we might prefer to use the substantive *H₂O* instead of the substantive *water*). Metaphor is neither an analysis nor a correction of existing linguistic usage. Nor is the metaphor a (medical) theory about empirical reality, though it may have been inspired by the results of empirical research and be actually intended to convey information about those results. Thus, the intellectual effort which the metaphor invites us to make is not a matter of semantics nor one of an investigation of empirical reality; rather, we are invited to wonder how what we ordinarily associate with the word *pump* could be applied to the heart. The metaphor thus provokes in us the kind of puzzlement that is systematized in epistemology ("how does language hook onto the world?") and we are required by it to do some instant epistemology for this specific case. Just like epistemology, metaphor forces us to take a position that is beyond both language and reality in order to get an idea of how, for the metaphor in question, language and reality hang together.

One might add to this a comment of more general import. The metaphor "*a* is *b*" makes us wonder how we can speak about *a* in terms of *b*.⁶⁷ If we read "reality" for *a* and "language" for *b*, it will be obvious that the kind of question epistemology addresses (how does language enable us to speak about reality?) is essentially metaphorical. The secret of both epistemology and metaphor is that they require us temporarily to abandon our inclination to stick to either language or reality—an inclination codified by Hume with his division of "all objects of human reason" into (analytic) *relations of ideas* and (synthetic) *matters of fact*—in order to assume a point of view from which the relation between the two can be surveyed.

This insight into the metaphorical character of the epistemological enterprise permits the following view of the history of the relation between

67. Aristotle had already stated: "Metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species" (S. H. Butcher, ed., *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, New York, 1951, 77).

the two. As is well known, philosophers like Descartes, Hobbes, and Kant or Popper, who all had very strong epistemological leanings, were unanimously critical of metaphor. For them metaphor is a perversion of scientific rigor and clarity. But we should not interpret their hostility as meaning that metaphor and epistemology are quite different things. The opposite is true: epistemologists hated metaphor because they were vaguely aware that epistemology and metaphor are each other's rivals in the task of guiding the human mind. They wanted epistemology to perform in a better, more final, and more definitive way the job that was only incidentally and haphazardly performed by metaphor. Just as the modern state is a monopolization of the individual citizen's capacity for violence, so epistemology wanted to monopolize metaphor in one immensely powerful and omnipresent (epistemological) metaphor. Three conclusions follow from this. First, we may expect that disciplines that have always demonstrated an anarchistic resistance to the monopolization of metaphor by epistemology—and the writing of history is the best example of such a discipline as is recognized by current theory of history⁶⁸—will continue to make a relatively free use of metaphor. Second, we may expect that as soon as the hold of epistemology begins to weaken, metaphor will make its reappearance on the scene. Mary Hesse's views on the metaphorical character of the sciences are an example in point.⁶⁹ Third, because of the inherently metaphorical character of epistemology, we may expect to find a *master-metaphor* at the end of all epistemological systems. A metaphor, that is, which is supposed to supersede all other metaphors; a metaphor which is tantamount to the Goethean *Urphänomen* of metaphor and is a limit beyond which we cannot go.

It is not at all difficult to be more specific about the nature of this master-metaphor. What we ordinarily find at the end of epistemological argument is typically an optical or spatial metaphor. And who could resist the seduction of spatial metaphor when we are asked to define epistemologically the relation between these two "parallel planes" of language and reality? One may think here of Descartes's notion of the *idées claires et distinctes*, with its obvious reliance upon a metaphor of visual perception in

68. Perhaps the statement requires qualification. Contemporary theory of history often presents itself in the cloak of historiography. But this "new" historiography is different from the traditional history of historical writing, as we find it in the textbooks by Fueter or Barnes. Contemporary historiography, since Hayden White's influential work, often has the form of a textual analysis demonstrating "what made the historical text possible." Thus, in a way reminiscent of Foucault, epistemological preoccupations still inspire much of contemporary historical theory, though the nature of these epistemological concerns differs conspicuously from those of some twenty years ago.

69. M. B. Hesse, "Models, Metaphor and Truth," in F. R. Ankersmit and J. J. A. Mooij, eds., *Metaphor and Knowledge*, Dordrecht, 1992.

terms of which Descartes phrases his criteria for epistemological certainty. We can think, furthermore, of how Wittgenstein has popularized the notion of the Kantian transcendental self by requiring us to imagine an eye that can only see what is within its field of perception but cannot see itself. And Wittgenstein's own assertion that "the sentence is a *picture* [my emphasis] of reality" provides us with another example.⁷⁰ But undoubtedly the best proof of epistemology's perennial fascination with spatial and optical metaphors can be found in Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Insofar as Rorty provides us in the first half of his book with a history of epistemological thought (a history he is, in fact, using for a "deconstruction" of the whole epistemological tradition), it is an integral part of his enterprise to demonstrate the extent to which optical metaphors, like the one of our "glassy essence" or the one of language or the mind being a "mirror" of reality, have always determined the nature and the content of epistemological thought.⁷¹

If we now take a look at the writing of history and historical thought we will encounter a roughly similar picture. As everybody will realize, spatial metaphors have always been quite popular in historical theory. Subjectivists liked to use the hackneyed metaphor of the "spectacles of the historian" that "color" his "view" of the past; next we find the ubiquitous and virtually obligatory metaphors of historical "insight," of "perspective" (Nietzsche), of *conspectus* (Cassirer), or of *point of view* (a metaphor to which I shall return in a moment). And in order to contest the argument that spatial metaphors only occur in impressionistic accounts of the nature of historical knowledge, I would like to recall Foucault's rapture with spatial metaphors, for instance his *epistemological fields* that ought to be *orthogonally projected* onto the plane of historical representation.⁷² However, if we wish to get hold of what comes closest in historical theory to an epistemological "master-metaphor," we can best turn to a most suggestive spatial metaphor proposed by L. O. Mink. Mink argues that the historian's task is essentially one of synthesis and integration: the historian must effect in his work what Mink refers to as a *configurational comprehension* of the different constituents of the past. Furthermore, within this configurational comprehension, the historian aims for an integration as complete as possible of the events related at the beginning of his historical narrative with those of the end—and with everything between:

But in the configurational comprehension, the end is connected with the promise of the beginning as well as the beginning with the promise of the

70. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London, 1961, section 4.01.

71. R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Oxford, 1980, 42ff.

72. H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Brighton, 1982, 85ff.

end, and the necessity of the backward reference cancels out, so to speak, the contingency of the forward reference. To comprehend temporal succession means to think of it in both directions at once and thus time is no longer the river which bears us along but the river in aerial view, upstream and downstream in a single survey.⁷³

The spatial metaphor thus suggests a “deconstruction” of time through space, in the sense that temporal succession is nullified thanks to the point of view located in a space outside the river of time itself.

I want to emphasize that Mink’s metaphor is in agreement with how historicism traditionally conceived of the nature of historical knowledge—and the implication is, of course, that because of their shared reliance upon a spatial metaphor, historicism is inspired by the same mentality as epistemology in its effort to provide science with a sound epistemological foundation. First, it should be observed that Mink’s *configurational comprehension* is identical to the *historical ideas* which, according to Humboldt, in his famous essay on the historian’s task, the historian should discover in the manifold of the historically given.⁷⁴ Both the configurational comprehension and the historical idea individuate a point of view from which the past can be seen as a coherent *unity*. But what is more important, Ranke in his theoretical writings used exactly the same metaphor as Mink. Thus Gadamer quotes Ranke as follows: “I imagine the Deity—if I may allow myself this observation—as seeing the whole of historical humanity in its totality (since no time lies before the Deity), and finding it all equally valuable.”⁷⁵ Ranke places God here in a transhistorical place that is formally identical to the point of view outside the flow of time, where Mink located the historian in his attempt to gain a survey of a part of the past. And Gadamer comments that Ranke invokes here the notion of an infinite understanding (*intellectus infinitus*), for which—and this is in agreement with the suggestion of Mink’s metaphor—everything takes place at one and the same time (*omnium simul*). The infinite intellect or understanding that the historicist historian strives for effects a supersession of time; a supersession that is ultimately realized in the mind of God. Indeed, this is the kind of

73. L. O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*, eds. Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob, and Richard T. Vann, Ithaca, 1987, 56–57.

74. Humboldt, *Ranke*, 14. Humboldt discusses here the notion of the *historical idea*.

75. Quoted in Gadamer, *Truth*, 185. The crucial role played by point of view in historical writing was already recognized by the German eighteenth-century scholar Johann Martin Chladenius:

We cannot avoid that each of us looks on the story according to his point of view and that we also retell it according to that point of view. . . . A narration wholly abstracted from its own point of view is impossible, and hence an impartial narration cannot be called one that narrates without any point of view at all, for such simply is not possible. (See Gossman, *Literature*, 230.)

understanding of the past that is the final aim of all historist understanding of the past. As Ranke says himself, the more the historian succeeds in thinking historically in the way just defined, "the more his thought is God-like."⁷⁶

At this stage it must be pointed out where the historist and the postmodernist nostalgic views of the past crucially differ. As we have seen, the postmodernist, nostalgic experience of the past rejects a dissociation of the present from the experience of the past: the experience of the past is the experience of a *difference* between the past and the present, from which the latter *eo ipso* cannot be detached. This is quite different in historism. It is true that the historist will also see "differences," but these are always differences within the past *itself* (as, for instance, the distance in the past corresponding to the beginning and the end of the river of time that is surveyed by the historian in Mink's metaphor). The present, the historian himself, is *no* ingredient in this difference. For the historian is reduced to a merely transcendental, transhistorical self without an empirical (temporal or historical) self. Here we find another explanation of why traditional (historist) philosophy of history was not interested in developing a critique of historical experience or doing for the writing of history what eighteenth-century philosophy had done for science. Historist historical theory excluded the realm of (historical) experience from its considerations. Evidently, to contrast historist and postmodernist historical theory in this way is tantamount to criticizing historism for its tendency to place the historian in the God-like position Ranke had in mind for him. Our next step will now obviously be to ask ourselves how the historist can amend his mistake within the matrix of his historical theory.

One way of effecting such a correction would be to place the historical subject in an extension of the flow of Mink's river of time. And, indeed, as I have tried to show in an analysis of Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, such a solution is possible. However, the price the historist will have to pay for this solution is high (and will probably exceed the amount of intellectual capital he has at his disposal). For, as will become clear if we visualize Mink's metaphor, the disappearance of the metaphorical point of view, on a safe hilltop high above the river of time (that has now been exchanged for the point the river of time has now reached), will also mean that the possibility of surveying the flow of time has disappeared, and history hence becomes essentially unnarratable. And, indeed, such a destruction of narrative takes place in the work by Tocqueville just mentioned. Metaphor, point of view, and all that the historist likes to associate with

76. Gadamer, *Truth*, 186.

these then lose their function, and what remains is a past that is nothing more than a system of variations on a single theme.⁷⁷

Because of these problems which we run into when opting for the above correction of historism's shortcomings, we are well-advised to consider Gadamer's solution for the historian's predicament. Gadamer's characterization of the historian's problem is as follows. He correctly points out that what most needs correction is the historian's decision to place the historian himself outside the flow of historical time; indeed, the major insight informing the whole of Gadamer's magnificent study is "that we only understand historically because we are ourselves historical beings."⁷⁸ Gadamer shows, next, that since Grimm, Gundolf, and Dilthey, there has been no lack of attempts to effect such a historicization of the historical subject.⁷⁹ But these attempts, Gadamer argues, never bore fruit—and consequently historical thought always remained swaddled in the tight cloth of an epistemological historism.

The lack of success of these earlier attempts to be a "consistent" historian (if the historian wishes to historicize everything, how could he possibly exclude himself from the process?) already suggests that a historicization of the historical subject is not an easy task. First, there is the problem of relativism that will result from the historicization of the historical subject. But the problem of relativism is not an interesting one from the present point of view. Relativism results when we historicize the historical subject and historical knowledge but nevertheless retain a nostalgia for absolute, transhistorical certainties. If we bear in mind the way that historism placed the historical subject in a transcendental position, we will see that, in this context, the problem of relativism is merely a restatement of the problem at hand in this discussion rather than the addition of a new dimension to it.

A more interesting problem is that the historicization of the historian and historical knowledge effects a coalescence of the level of the writing of history and that of historiography (the history of historical writing). Whereas, the historicization of, for example, physics, need not obliterate our capacity to distinguish clearly between the discussion of physical reality on the one hand and the history of scientific debate on the other; in the case of history, we cannot be so confident about the possibility of telling historiography apart from history itself. The explanation is, of course, that an easy and straightforward distinction between the object

77. See my "Tocqueville and the Sublimity of Democracy," *The Tocqueville Review* XV (1994).

78. Gadamer, *Truth*, 203.

79. Gadamer, *Truth*, 267.

level and metalevel is more complicated here since we are dealing with the *same* discipline (that is, history) at both levels. One level will unavoidably become contaminated with the problems of the other. Surely, this is a problem that is not completely new to historical theory and practice. As far as theory is concerned, one may think of Hegel's philosophy of history. According to Hegel, historical insight itself is an integral part of the plot of history, since historical insight into the historical process of the self-realization of the Spirit is the very essence of history.⁸⁰ Thus the history of historical insight became part of the plot of history itself. With regard to historical practice, we will observe that historians generally consider the history of historical debate about a certain historical issue as not merely a propaedeutics to new historical insight but as a crucial part of it. This is especially true for domains of history like intellectual history. If we study contemporary interpretations of, say, Locke, Montesquieu, or Rousseau, we will acknowledge that it is impossible to say where a discussion of previous interpretations leaves off and a discussion of Locke or any of the other political thinkers themselves begins. Both levels of debate are inextricably bound up in the practice of intellectual history.

And here, then, we encounter the aporia of a consistent historicism that has the courage to historicize the historical subject too. If we opt for this historicization of the historical subject, the historicist metaphor that was so aptly formulated by Mink will disintegrate into incoherence. For, a metaphorical view of *the past itself*—as such—is now no longer possible; what misleadingly announces itself as such a view has become indiscernible from the fluctuating positions of historical writing. Points of view mingle with points of view on points of view, and the past itself with interpretations of the past. The spatial metaphor of the point of view destroys itself.

After having become aware of this problem of historicism's self-destruction—if it really has "le courage de ses opinions"—we must return to Gadamer again. For with an appeal to the concept of "effective-history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), Gadamer has made an impressive attempt to solve the aporias of historicism and to move to a historical hermeneutics in which the transcendentalist proclivities of traditional historicism have been overcome. "True historical thinking," writes Gadamer,

must take account of its own historicity. Only then will it not chase the phantom of an historical object which is the object of progressive research, but learn to see in the object the counterpart of itself and hence understand

80. Spirit is, for Hegel, both historical consciousness and an active principle: "Der Geist handelt wesentlich, er macht sich zu dem, was er an sich ist, zu seiner Tat, zu seinem Werk; so wird er sich Gegenstand, so hat er sich als ein Dasein vor sich" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Band I. Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1970, 67).

both. The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other [as in the nostalgic experience of the past], a relationship in which exist both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. A proper hermeneutics would have to demonstrate the effectivity of history within understanding itself. I shall refer to this as "effective-history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). Understanding is, essentially, an effective-historical relation (*ein wirkungsgeschichtlicher Vorgang*).⁸¹

So *Wirkungsgeschichte* is not merely an auxiliary discipline of history, like that most peculiar discipline of the history of historical writing (commonly referred to as historiography). Historiography in its traditional form—one may think here of the books by Fueter, Iggers, or Breisach, whose value I respect no less than those of their historian counterparts in the domain of historical writing—has a most artificial cognitive status since it repeats at the level of the objectification of historical writing that same isolation or transcendentalization of the historical subject that we found in historicism at the level of historical writing itself. Historiography, contrary to appearances, is *not* a fulfillment of the Gadamerian requirement of the historicization of the historical subject but is, in fact, a *double* refusal to do so. Thanks to this double refusal, an artificial no-man's-land is created between historiography and the writing of history that automatically robs historiography of the value it ought to have, in Gadamer's view, for the writing of history. According to Gadamer, the historicization of the historical subject should *not* result in a mere multiplication of layers in historical thought or writing: historicization must become part of historical writing itself. Only if we recognize that an awareness of *Wirkungsgeschichte* is, before all, an awareness of the hermeneutic situation, shall we be able to effectively vindicate the inconsistencies of historicism.

Nevertheless, the objections formulated against traditional historiography in the previous paragraph may also make us suspicious of *Wirkungsgeschichte*. For we may wonder whether there is really an alternative to traditional historiography as the notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* suggests. What, in fact, *is Wirkungsgeschichte*? Let us grant Gadamer that we can never obtain full and definite knowledge of *Wirkungsgeschichte* because of the inherent limitations of historical knowledge: "That we should become completely aware of effective-history is just as hybrid a statement as when Hegel speaks of absolute knowledge, in which history would become completely transparent to itself and hence be raised to the level of a concept."⁸² Surely, *this* would not be a convincing argument against the notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte*; for the same could be said of a historical notion like *the French Revolution*, a notion that we could never do without and do

81. Gadamer, *Truth*, 267.

82. Gadamer, *Truth*, 268.

not hesitate to use. The fundamental problem is, rather, that there can be no end to the process of historicization of historical insight as will be required if the notion *Wirkungsgeschichte* is to stand for, or at least refer to, some aspect or phase in historical writing. The term suggests that there is a nameable entity we can refer to by the term *Wirkungsgeschichte* (what else might justify the use of the term?), but any attempt to identify that entity can only mean that we will push it further away again. To give content to the notion *Wirkungsgeschichte* is like the attempt to jump over one's shadow. For why stop with *Wirkungsgeschichte*, and why should we not historicize *Wirkungsgeschichte* itself (and so on indefinitely)? Thus *Wirkungsgeschichte* dissolves itself into an endless proliferation of historical self-reflections within an ever expanding historiographical present.

This is, nevertheless, how I propose to conceive of *Wirkungsgeschichte*. According to this proposal the notion does not refer—as is suggested by Gadamer's use of it—to a certain history or to a certain historical interpretation of historical debate. For me *Wirkungsgeschichte* is not a newly devised model for traditional historiography, and it does not possess an identifiable origin either in an objective past or in a completely comprehended tradition of historical analysis; for me *Wirkungsgeschichte* is a *movement*. It is a movement which is perpendicular to the flow of Mink's river of time and in which the historicization of Mink's *configurational comprehension* has neither origin nor end. As such, the movement of *Wirkungsgeschichte* is, paradoxically, both the fulfillment and the death of historicism. It is its fulfillment since *Wirkungsgeschichte* no longer excludes the transcendental historical subject standing on his safe hilltop from historicization; it is the death of historicism since the historicist points of view that always allowed historicist transcendentalism to historicize the past have lost the fixity that was essential for their ability to function *as* point of view. In the movement of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, points of view absorb points of views and since there is no end to the movement there can be no final or "master" point of view from which we can evolve and reconstruct the previous and more elementary ones. Thus, the most consistent and radical form of historicism is, at the same time, the transcendence of historicism.

In his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, which is partly an investigation of the fate of spatial and optical metaphors in the history of epistemology, Rorty ends with an exposition of what he sees as the consequence of Gadamer's destruction of epistemological pretensions. Rorty's equivalent of Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte* is what Rorty refers to as the *edifying philosopher*. Just as Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte* results in the abandonment of all "striving towards stability,"⁸³ a striving which had always been at the

83. Gadamer, *Truth*, 208.

very heart of epistemology, so Rorty's edifying philosopher has surrendered all pretense to fix once and for all a "vertical" link between language and reality. The edifying philosopher knows that everything he says and writes is part of "the conversation of mankind" and that what most counts is how what he says relates "horizontally" to what was and will be said before and after him.⁸⁴ The philosophers who agree with Gadamer's argument will therefore, Rorty writes,

present themselves as doing something different from, and more important than offering accurate representations of how things are. They will question the notion of "accurate representation," but, in order to be consistent, the edifying philosopher must also avoid taking the position that "a search for accurate representations of . . . (e.g., 'the most general traits of reality' or 'the nature of man')" is an *inaccurate* representation of philosophy. Whereas less pretentious revolutionaries can afford to have views on lots of things which their predecessors had views on, edifying philosophers have to decry the very notion of having a view, while avoiding having a view about having views.⁸⁵

In other words, the historicization of (historical) points of view not only makes them hard to identify (which would be the relativist query) but puts us in the paradoxical position that we should adopt the point of view of not having a point of view. *Metaphorizing* metaphor—as happens in *Wirkungsgeschichte*—means the elimination of metaphor and hence of the whole epistemological apparatus originating in metaphor. It results in the oxymoron of "the point of view of the absence of points of view."

5. THE POSTMODERNIST OBJECT OF HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

In the previous section we witnessed the autodestruction of historicism resulting in the dissolution of the metaphorical point of view. We can derive from this most, if not all, of the features we attributed above to the postmodernist attitude toward the past. It follows from this that we can justifiably say that postmodernism is a radicalization of historicism, a consistent historicism that is no longer content with the halfway houses in which traditional historicism was content to live. Let me clarify this claim.

First, if there is one methodological precept universally accepted by historians and even those who (vainly) tried to struggle to free themselves from historicist conceptions (such as the protagonists of "history as a [social] science"), it is the rule that the historian must place the object of his investigation in its historical context if he wishes to understand it. Domi-

84. Rorty, *Mirror*, 359.

85. Rorty, *Mirror*, 370–371.

nick LaCapra has recently attacked this central historicist dogma for the domain of intellectual history by pointing out that "an appeal to context is deceptive (. . .) one never has—at least in the case of complex texts—the context. The assumption that one does relies upon a hypostatization of 'context,' often in the sense of misleading organic or overly reductive analogues."⁸⁶ The context is historically no less complex and no less problematically given than the historical object we want to understand by contextualizing it. And one may suppose that the (mistaken) belief that we can gain access to a historical object by placing it in its wider historical context is a methodological reminiscence of the historicist metaphysics of *Universalgeschichte*. With the disappearance of metaphor (and epistemology), however, historicist contextualization will be replaced by decontextualization. For it was always the historicist point of view that permitted the historian to see the contextual *coherence* of the elements of the past. With the collapse of Mink's metaphor of the vantage point, from which the flow of the river of time can be surveyed, and with the emergence of the postmodernist oxymoron of "the point of view of the absence of points of view," the elements of the past regain their autonomy and become independent of one another. And the result is the fragmentation of the past so characteristic of the postmodernist picture of the past.

Second, and in close connection with the preceding point, it is only thanks to metaphor that unity and coherence could be attributed to the past. For metaphor effects an *organization* of (historical) knowledge,⁸⁷ and this metaphorical organization is intended to reflect or to embody the unity the historian attempts to discover in, or project onto, the past. Again, with the dissolution of metaphorical organization, the past is transformed from a unified whole into an anarchistic totality of independent *petits récits*, to use Lyotard's postmodernist language. Third, with the greater autonomy of the elements of the past with regard to each other, and with the "democratization" of historical meaning, so to speak, the "aristocratic" hierarchization of the past into layers that are self-evidently of central importance (and those that are not) will have to yield to postmodernist "depthlessness." Note, furthermore, that historicism always effected the illusion of "depth" by comprehending everything as the result of a historical evolution. For the historicist, "depth" is historical perspective; for him the essence (or identity) of a nation, an institution, a social class, and so on, lies in its history.⁸⁸ In accordance with its distrust of contextualism, postmodernist historical writing will have little sympathy for the rhetorics of

86. D. LaCapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts," in LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language*, Ithaca, 1983, 35.

87. See chap. 3, paragraph 5 of this volume.

88. See note 19.

change that created the historicist illusion of depth. This may explain why postmodernist historical writing feels an elective affinity with anthropology. As Rüsen has perceptively pointed out, in anthropology “we have to do with those times and spaces of human life that do not let themselves be subsumed by a genetic conception of the coming into being of modern societies” (my translation).⁸⁹ The fascination of postmodernist historical writing with anthropology testifies to its wish to cut historical phenomena loose from the roots they have in their past.⁹⁰ And, fourth, the reification of the past effected by the historicist metaphor of the transhistorical historian, surveying the objectively given reality of the river of time, will have to be exchanged for a “nostalgic” experience of the past in which the past is no longer an external reality. Because of the dissolution of metaphor, the objective reality of the past is abandoned for postmodernist hyperreality, for a historical reality that only comes into being thanks to historical experience, thinking, and writing, in a way that will be clarified in the remainder of this section.

We may ask, next, where this radicalization and transcendence of historicism can be encountered in actual historical practice. In answering this question, we may do well to consider Braudel’s *Méditerranée*, since it can plausibly be argued that Braudel’s *opus famosum* is both the culmination point of the historicist search for unity and synthesis *and* the first announcement of a postmodernist experience of the past. For a clarification of this interpretation of Braudel’s book, I shall draw on Hans Kellner’s most perceptive analysis of this work. Kellner shows that most reviewers and commentators (e.g., Febvre, Van Houtte, Bailyn, and others) were indeed

89. “geht es um diejenigen Zeiten und Raumen des menschlichen Lebens, die sich nicht unter eine genetische Vorstellung von der Entstehung modernen Gesellschaften subsumieren lassen” (J. Rüsen, “Historische Aufklärung im Angesicht der Post-Moderne: Geschichte im Zeitalter der ‘neuen Unübersichtlichkeit,’” in Rüsen, *Zeit und Sinn: Strategien historischen Denkens*, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, 243).

90. It is sometimes argued that modernism has an elective affinity with time, and postmodernism with space. See, for example, D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford, 1990, 201ff. One might say, therefore, that postmodernist historical consciousness “spatializes” time: what was temporally different is transformed into spatial dispersion. Here we find part of the explanation of anthropology’s popularity within postmodernist historical writing. For, anthropology succeeds in confronting us with the different historical stages of human evolution existing contemporaneously at different parts of the globe. Stocking describes the transformation of historical consciousness at the end of the eighteenth century as follows: “Although later eighteenth-century progressivists often acknowledged a great debt to Montesquieu, between him and them the primary axis of cultural comparison had been displaced by ninety degrees, from the horizontal [or spatial] to the vertical [or temporal]” (G. W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York, 1987, 6). If Stocking is correct, one might discover in postmodernist historical writing a wish to return to a prehistoricist historical consciousness.

deeply impressed by Braudel's capacity for achieving a majestic synthesis of the chaotic manifold of the economic and political reality of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean world. But then Kellner strikes a different note by quoting Claude Lefort when the latter writes that Braudel was often led to "a pointillism that seems contrary to the sociological inspiration of the work."⁹¹ Kellner brilliantly expounds the nature and textual origins of this pointillism. In doing so he draws our attention to the "quicksand of the surface" of Braudel's text; he explores the "continuous series of oxymorons" we find there—for example, when Braudel chooses to speak of "liquid plains," "watery Saharas," and of "islands that the sea does not surround."⁹² Illustrative of Braudel's penchant for oxymoron and paradox is a map in which the Mediterranean is related to the rest of the world: the map shows a globe that has "the South Pole at the top and is dominated by an enormous looming Africa."⁹³ Clearly, as Kellner notes, these textual ploys are intended to "defamiliarize" the past and systematically to undermine any fixed notions about the past we might already have. But most striking is Braudel's own statement that his book could best be seen as "an hourglass, eternally reversible."⁹⁴ Surely, no metaphor could be more hostile to the metaphorical, historicist approach to the past than this metaphor of a continual reversal and destruction of vantage points. This metaphor is a metaphor of the death of metaphor. Consequently, this great book of Braudel, ordinarily seen as the paradigm of "scientific" historical writing and of the powers of historical synthesis, contains at the same time the seeds of the disintegration of a metaphorical, synthetic understanding of the past.

But these postmodernist, antihistorist tendencies would long remain unechoed in contemporary historical writing. Attempts to transform history into a science, together with Braudel's own program for a *histoire totale* or *globale*, assured for a long time the ascendancy of historical synthesis in the discipline. And although the route to postmodernist conceptions had already been paved one or even two decades ago by, for example, Foucault's genealogy and Ginzburg's *microstorie*, it is only in recent years that we have come across historians who are ready to make an outright attack on the synthetical centrism of historicist historical theory and practice. An indication of this recent change of mood can be found in the rejection by the German historian Hans Medick of what he refers to as "centrist points

91. H. Kellner, "Disorderly Conduct: Braudel's Mediterranean Satire," in Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation*, Madison, 1989, 158–159. See also, by the same author, "As real as it gets . . .": Ricoeur and Narrativity," *Philosophy Today* 1990 (34,3); especially 236ff.

92. Kellner, *Language*, 164–165.

93. Kellner, *Language*, 167.

94. Kellner, *Language*, 168.

of view," with the argument that "such points of view prematurely locate historical phenomena at the periphery or at the center of historical development, in both cases by having recourse to the notion of the 'Big Change,' be it modernization, industrialization, urbanization or the coming into being of bureaucratic institutions and nation states."⁹⁵

Medick is a well-known protagonist of *Alltagsgeschichte*, and since *Alltagsgeschichte* can best be seen as a branch of the larger historical subdiscipline of the history of mentalities, we may expect that the latter will provide us with the best and most representative examples of postmodernist historical writing. If we return, then, to the history of mentalities, we will recognize that one of its most conspicuous features in comparison with other historical subdisciplines is its remarkable discovery of new objects of historical research. This inventiveness of the history of mentalities is of special interest in the context of this discussion. For, a crucial difference between historicist and postmodernist historical thought is that the latter resists the reification of the past that comes so naturally to historicism (and positivist theories of historical writing). We may expect, therefore, that a close look at the discovery of new objects of historical investigation by the history of mentalities will introduce us into the magic circle, within which the postmodernist historical reality and historical experience originate. By studying the discovery of new objects of historical investigation in the history of mentalities, we may succeed in giving some more concrete detail to the postmodernist "nostalgic" experience of difference I discussed in a previous section.

The crucial datum here is that the history of mentalities finds its new objects and looks for the experience of difference in places where previous historical writing would have seen only an *absence* of difference. The history of mentalities is the history of love, of sexuality, of the fear of death, and so on (i.e., of those aspects of human existence that were believed to be relatively immune to historical change and to possess a quasi-natural permanence). Put differently, the history of mentalities problematizes our intuitive convictions of a "familiarity" with the past. It turns the defamiliarization of the past, so surreptitiously introduced by Braudel, into a historical program. It is in this defamiliarization of the quasi-natural (obviously, a decontextualization of the quasi-natural) that we can find our most valuable clue for gaining a grasp of the postmodernist historical object and

95. "solche Sichtweisen rücken historische Phänomene vorschnell an den Rand bzw. im Zentrum historischen Geschehens, in beiden Fällen stets unter dem Gesichtspunkt der 'grossen Veränderung,' sei es der Modernisierung, Industrialisierung, Verstädterung oder der Entstehung bürokratischen Anstalten und Nationalstaaten" (H. Medick, "Entlegene Geschichte? Sozialgeschichte im Blickpunkt der Kulturanthropologie," in Comité international des sciences historiques, ed., *17e Congreso internacional de ciencias históricas. Vol. 1. Grands thèmes, méthodologie, sections chronologiques 1. Rapports et abrégés*, Madrid, 1990, 181.

the postmodernist experience of difference. We must observe that defamiliarization is a tearing apart of what originally was seen as an ahistorical, natural present into a historical present and a historical past, while the experience of the unfamiliar presupposes a continuous awareness of the separation process. In other words, defamiliarization is a *duplication* of the originally natural present, while the memory of the unity antedating the duplication is the background against which the experience of the unfamiliar can only articulate itself. The similarity between defamiliarization in contemporary history of mentalities and the historical experience or sensation, as described by Goethe and Huizinga, will need no elucidation.

The duplication of the familiar (and the concomitant experience of defamiliarization) has been closely analyzed by Freud in his essay on the uncanny. That the uncanny should turn up in our discussion need not be surprising. The feeling of nostalgia, or *Heimweh*, of being far away from one's *Heim* or home contrary to one's wishes, must be closely related to the feeling of *Unheimlichkeit*—Freud's term for the uncanny.⁹⁶ The experience of the uncanny is characterized by Freud as such: "that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self."⁹⁷ The similarity between the experience of the uncanny and the way the history of mentalities opposes a part of our initially natural self (the part historicized by the history of mentalities) to that natural self is that *both* effect this division of the self Freud described in the passage just cited. In both cases we can observe a process of duplication that grants an uncanny independence to what we think ought to be part of ourselves, of our "natural" identity, of our *Heim* (= home), but no longer is. Thus, according to Freud, the objects that paradigmatically evoke in us a feeling of *Unheimlichkeit* are chopped-off limbs that seem to have kept a life of their own; a chopped-off head, arm, or foot may "have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when they prove capable of independent action in addition."⁹⁸ Similarly, the history of mentalities bestows an uncanny independence on those aspects of ourselves that we always believed to be part of our unchanging nature, but that the historian of mentalities demonstrates to be historically contingent—an independence which historicism would always seek to neutralize again by making these uncanny aspects of the past

96. Megill demonstrates that Heidegger had already linked nostalgia and the uncanny. See Megill, *Prophets*, 119.

97. S. Freud, "The Uncanny," in Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, London, 1955, 243.

98. Freud, *Uncanny*, 244.

into a part of the process of historical evolution that was expected to integrate them into our essence or our *identity*.

Apart from these formal similarities, there also is a material affinity between the uncanny and postmodernist historical writing. Consider, first, that the history of mentalities began as the history of love, sexuality, the fear of death, et cetera. Especially the themes of death and of speculations concerning death are clearly in agreement with Freud's assertion that "many people experience the uncanny in the highest degree in relation to death, and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts."⁹⁹ This link between the uncanny and the return of the past in some way or other to the present is, of course, quite interesting from the perspective of this chapter. And from here the history of mentalities evolved into a history of the belief in witches, in the animistic powers certain people were believed to possess, and into the history of a wide variety of superstitions—in short into a "history of the uncanny." Because of its fascination with the history of superstition, the history of mentalities seems in a curious way to retrace the same route as the Enlightenment. But if the Enlightenment's aim was to destroy superstition by laying bare the (corrupt) historical conditions that gave rise to it, postmodernist history of mentalities presents superstition as a permanent potential possibility since it is, and was, the result of a duplication of the self and not a world that is radically alien to us. Superstition is the "other" of our culture. Hence, the "production" of the uncanny in the history of mentalities may demonstrate the futility of all our attempts to minimize superstition as merely the sad remnants of a less Enlightened past. For such attempts are, in fact, attempts to repress what we subconsciously know to be a part of ourselves (which certainly does *not* mean that this repression is a bad thing in all cases). We must recognize that "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."¹⁰⁰

But there is another element in Freud's train of thought that no less deserves our attention. Freud describes in his essay how he himself once experienced the uncanny when he had lost his way on a hot afternoon in a small Italian village. He wandered through the streets that were deserted because of siesta time and found, to his dismay, that in his effort to retrace his route he returned to the same street three times. This unintended

99. Freud, *Uncanny*, 241. Quite interesting here is Goethe's remark about his (nostalgic) experience of the past, that it "brought something spectral in the present"; see note 52.

100. Freud, *Uncanny*, 241.

threefold return to the same place gave him a sudden feeling of helplessness and of *Unheimlichkeit*.¹⁰¹

This association or combination of an experience of the uncanny, of siesta time, and of, in Freud's own words, "die beständige Wiederkehr des Gleichen" (the eternal return of the same),¹⁰² brings us to the strange and complex topic known as "the terrors of noontime," the historical roots of which can be traced back to the dawn of human civilization. In a series of both learned and poetic essays, the French historian Roger Caillois has described the role this topic has played in the folklore and poetry of preclassical and classical Greece.¹⁰³ He demonstrates that for the Greeks—and the Egyptians—noontime was just as much a fatal hour as midnight often was in Western folklore and provoked similar fears and anxieties concerning death, the dead, and, characteristically, the *return* of the dead. Noontime is thus associated with an undoing of what seemed to have become irrevocable in and by the past, and the fact that noontime awakens in us the paradoxical fear of the return precisely of whom we have loved most only adds to our anxiety and confusion. Indeed, it was at noontime that one's thoughts were with the dead; thus Sophocles explicitly states in his *Antigone* that Antigone offered a sacrifice to Polynices, her dead brother, at noontime. At noontime the curtains of the temples were ordinarily drawn, not because at that time the temple should be reserved for the Gods, but because noontime is the hour of the dead and then it is dangerous for mortals, even for the priests, to enter the temple.¹⁰⁴ It was at noontime that the Sirens, the ancestresses of the vampires of a later date, threatened the sailors in open sea with all the more chance of success since the heat of the sun and the absence of wind at that time of the day weakened the defenses of the sailors against their seductions.¹⁰⁵ It was at noontime that the shepherds of Arcadia abandoned their herds and hid from the sun under the scanty shrubbery of the stony and burning fields. If the heat of the day already forbade all activity, the fear of awakening Pan by playing their shepherd's flutes condemned them even more so to a "lourde inac-

101. Freud, *Uncanny*, 237.

102. Freud, *Uncanny*, 234. Later on Freud speaks of "the theme that achieves such an indubitably uncanny effect, the unintended recurrence of the same thing" (Freud, *Uncanny*, 269).

103. R. Caillois, "Les démons de midi," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 115 (1937): 142–173 (referred to as Caillois, *Démons I*); R. Caillois, "Les démons de midi," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 116 (1937): 54–83 (referred to as Caillois, *Démons II*); R. Caillois, "Les démons de midi," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 116 (1937): 143–187 (referred to as Caillois, *Démons III*). I want to thank Drs. J. C. den Hollander for his valuable advice concerning the topic of "the terrors of noontime").

104. Caillois, *Démons I*, 166ff.

105. Caillois, *Démons II*, 54ff.

tivité.”¹⁰⁶ Yet falling asleep was no less dangerous since sleep made the shepherds an all-too-easy victim for the nymphs that fed on human blood and sperm and in doing so reduced their victims to permanent insanity. It was at noontime, lastly, that Christ died on the Cross, that the earth trembled and the skies darkened, as is testified by the Gospels. As the final example suggests, Christianity could be no less sensitive to “the terrors of noontime” than pagan Antiquity. There can be no doubt, Caillois comments, that the “acedia” suffered by monks since St. Anthony and described by so many worried authors throughout the Middle Ages, is the direct descendant of the mysterious and irrational anxieties provoked by “the terrors of noontime.”¹⁰⁷

Evidently, the experience of “the terrors of noontime” must essentially be an experience of nature. As such, its characteristics are several: there is, above all, the heat of the early afternoon, when the sun has its greatest power; there is the absence of wind; there is a kind of metaphysical silence that seems to overwhelm nature around noon; and, last but not least, there is the danger of sunstroke (whose pathological symptoms are, in a most significant way, already anticipated in the physical and mental paralysis effected by the discomforts of noontime).¹⁰⁸ But more important than all these phenomena is the following: Noontime, in southern countries, effects a quite characteristic change in the manner the natural world presents itself to us. Normally, especially in the morning and the evening, nature, trees, shrubbery, houses, et cetera, seem to be part of a greater totality encompassing them all. The main reason for this is that objects and their shadows intermingle and thus blend into one another. By contrast, “l’individualité de l’heure de midi vient, comme on l’a vu, de la diminution de l’ombre”¹⁰⁹—shadows disappear at noon when the sun is at its zenith, everything withdraws, together with its shadow, into itself, becomes what it is, coincides with its essence, while no longer leaving any room for the “shadowy” nuances between what is essential and what is contingent or mere appearance. At noontime in Mediterranean countries the “contact” between the objects we see around us seems momentarily suspended, and objects appear no longer to take an interest in each other—and in us. The effect this has on the human psyche—and this gives us the essence of the “terrors of noontime”—is a feeling of being ejected or excluded from

106. Caillois, *Démons III*, 149.

107. Caillois, *Démons III*, 168ff.

108. Caillois, *Démons II*, 61. See also Caillois, *Démons III*, 166. In this third essay in the series Caillois is most explicit about the sexual dimensions of the experience of noontime: “d’une façon générale, midi est une heure sexuelle” (Caillois, *Démons III*, 150). Sexually, then, noontime stimulates pederasty and autoeroticism, hence a fascination with one’s own sexuality.

109. Caillois, *Démons I*, 155–156.

reality itself. The experience was well expressed by Leconte de Lisle as follows:

Homme, si le coeur plein de joie ou d'amerture,
 Tu passais vers midi dans les champs radieux,
 Fuis! la nature est vide et le soleil consume;
 Rien n'est vivant ici, rien n'est triste ni joyeux.¹¹⁰

Nature has turned away from us, becomes absorbed within itself, and can no longer function as the receptacle for our joys and griefs. The world has turned its back to us and no longer invites us to be part of it. Put differently, the physical reality that used to be our natural home or *Umwelt*, in which we recognized ourselves and which is therefore ordinarily felt to be an indissoluble part of ourselves, suddenly has become strange, unfamiliar, and inhospitable. Nature becomes *unheimlich*. A reality that was part of our life has become independent of us (like Freud's chopped-off limbs), alien and intent upon leading its *own* life. Temporarily, we have thus lost a part of ourselves and of what we thought to be a proper and natural part of our identity. We are most painfully reminded of what, in all likelihood, is the most traumatic event in the life of each human individual: the separation process that forever and irretrievably broke down the solipsistic unity in which we lived with reality for the first months of our existence; a process that placed us for the rest of our lives as lonely individuals opposite physical and social reality. And the futility of our nostalgic yearning for a reestablishment of that primeval unity is demonstrated each time we experience "the terrors of noontime."

With his usual historical acumen, Hegel recognized all this in what Pan symbolized for the Greeks (though it must be admitted that the Hegelian scheme of the objective, the subjective, and the absolute spirit, the scheme dictating Hegel's periodization of history, happened to be peculiarly helpful and suggestive in this case). "Panic fright," the kind of fright Pan might inspire in the Arcadian shepherds, was how the Greeks liked to conceive of "the terrors of noontime." And about Pan, Hegel notes:

The position of curious surmise, of attentive eagerness to catch the meaning of nature, is indicated to us in the comprehensive idea of Pan. To the Greeks Pan did not represent the *objective* whole, but that indefinite neutral ground

110. "Man, if you pass through the radiant fields at noontime, / And your heart is full of joy or bitterness, / Flee, nature is empty and the sun engulfs all; / Nothing is alive here, nothing is sad or joyous" (my translation). (Quoted from "Midi," in C. M. R. Leconte de Lisle, *Poèmes Antiques*, Paris 1872. See also T. Lemaire, "De Middag," in Lemaire, *Filosofie van het Landschap*, Baarn, 1970.) This essay is a most remarkable and sensitive interpretation of the experience of noontime. Most illuminating is Lemaire's characterization of Van Gogh's Mediterranean landscapes as expressive of "the terrors of noontime."

which involves the element of the *subjective*; he embodies that thrill which pervades us in the silence of the forests.¹¹¹

As Hegel suggests with his assertion that "panic fright" contains "a moment of the subjective," nature, or Pan, does not so much frighten us in its sudden appearance as a total "other," but because this "other" is recognized as a *former* part of ourselves. It is the fright caused by the familiar that has become defamiliarized, unfamiliar, and that suddenly confronts us; a fright, therefore, that contains what is essential in the experience of the uncanny.

And here, finally, my argument closes. The nostalgic experience of the past, the experience of the past as we find it in the relevant domains of the history of mentalities, is not the experience of a (historist) quasi-object, outside ourselves and as little part of ourselves as the kind of physical objects investigated by the physicist. We unproblematically accept the independence from us of the objects the physicist investigates; the independence of the objects dealt with in the history of mentalities gives us an experience of the uncanny because we correctly discover in these objects estranged parts of our cultural and historical identity. It is precisely this aspect of them that is investigated in the history of mentalities; however, they are not investigated as *objects*, but as objects embodying a "distance" from and yet, at the same time, within ourselves. The uncanny independence of the objects discussed in the history of mentalities does not serve to *objectify* the past, but, on the contrary, to *undo* (historist and positivist) objectification; it suggests the mysterious existence of a realm lying *between* ourselves and the reified past of the historist and the positivist.

Several scholars, amongst them Schlechta and Bollnow, have demonstrated the prominence of the notion of noontime in the later work of Nietzsche. However, in contrast to the classical tradition, the association of the experience of noontime with unpleasant feelings or with the uncanny is curiously absent from Nietzsche's writings on the topic. The *grosser Mittag* is for Nietzsche rather his favorite symbol for happiness, completion,

111. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, New York, 1956, 352. For the original, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Band II–IV. Die orientalische Welt. Die Griechische und die Römische Welt. Die germanische Welt* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1976), 235. The original passage is as follows:

Die Form des Lauschens des Geistes, des Ahnens, der Sinnigkeit haben wir angegeben. Beim blossen Ahnen and Sehnen aber bleibt der Geist nicht stehen; er muss sich auf das Sehnen Antwort geben. Das liegt z.B. in der Vorstellung des *Pan*; es ist dies das All, nicht als ein Objektives allein, sondern zugleich als das wodurch ein Schauer erweckt wird . . . : in Griechenland ist er [i.e., Pan] nicht das objektive Ganze, sondern das Unbestimmte, das dabei mit dem Momente des Subjektiven verbunden ist.

and perfection. It may seem, as has been argued by Schlechta, that while Nietzsche emphasized even more than classical authors the basic and original character of the experience of noontime, he was tempted to transform the experience into an allegory (or parody) of Christ's coming—certainly a procedure one would hardly have expected from this herald of the antichrist.¹¹² However, it is true that Nietzsche attributed to the experience of noontime a feeling of happiness that is not entirely without the elements we noted above; Bollnow describes the feeling as “ein schweres und dunkles, irgendwie *unheimliches* [my emphasis] und hintergründiges Glück.” (A heavy and dark, somehow *uncanny* and shadowy kind of happiness.)¹¹³ However, what may justify this short excursus on Nietzsche's view of the experience of noontime is the interesting fact that he projected onto it a certain notion of historical time. This enables us to add a final detail to the account offered here of the differences of historicism and post-modernism. Admittedly, the linkage of the experience of noontime with a notion of historical time can already be found in the writings of classical authors. Thus, Callimachos and Hermias observed that time—as represented by the movement of the shadows projected by trees, buildings, et cetera—seems to slow down when noontime approaches in order to stop completely for a fractional moment when that moment has in fact arrived. At that moment, linear time (which has produced the moment) and eternity (when time has come to a stop) seem to coincide.¹¹⁴

But Nietzsche gave an even more dramatic meaning to the notion of time as symbolized by the experience of noontime by relating the latter to his idea of the eternal return of the same (*die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*). Nietzsche's notion of time and the experience of noontime are explicitly related, for example, in the following passage: “and in each cycle of human existence there will always be an hour, when first one, then many, then all embrace the most powerful thought, the thought of the eternal return of all things:—for humanity this is each time the hour of noontime.”¹¹⁵ These and related pronouncements by Nietzsche (mostly in *Also*

112. K. Schlechta, *Nietzsches grosser Mittag*, Frankfurt am Main, 1954, 52. Schlechta speaks here of “Zarathustra's Bibelparodie” and gives an impressive number of examples in order to support his claim.

113. O. F. Bollnow, *Das Wesen der Stimmungen*, Frankfurt am Main, 1956, 222.

114. Caillois, *Démons I*, 157–158. Caillois adds the following comment: “Il est d'ailleurs une raison décisive de s'intéresser à l'ombre; c'est que, très généralement sinon universellement, l'âme lui est identifiée et que la force de l'une dépend de la longueur de l'autre.” At noontime, therefore, the world has become “soulless”; its essence, or soul, has disappeared. The world has disintegrated into an infinity of vaguely threatening fragments, strange, uncanny, and clearly beyond our grasp.

115. “und in jedem Ring des Menschendaseins gibt es immer eine Stunde, wo erst einem, dann vielen, dann allen der mächtigste Gedanke auftaucht, der von der ewigen Wiederkunft aller Dinge:—es ist jedesmal für die Menschheit die Stunde des Mittags” (quoted in Bollnow, *Stimmungen*, 233).

sprach Zarathustra) have been a favorite challenge to the interpretative acumen of Nietzsche's numerous commentators at least since Heidegger¹¹⁶—especially so since Nietzsche himself is nowhere very clear about his exact intentions. But what most, if not all, commentators agree upon is that the combination of the two ideas of the *grosser Mittag* and of the myth of eternal return are meant by Nietzsche to be a critique of linear (historist) time—the conception of time within which each present emerges within a linear series from the past that immediately preceded it. The myth of eternal return breaks down this linear and evolutionary conception of time by strongly emphasizing the moment *itself*, at the expense of its merely being a part of a developing series of moments (which gives us historism). The idea is as follows: If, in conformity with the myth of eternal return, each moment is repeated endlessly, the moment will emancipate itself from the links it has with its past and its future and become an “eternal moment” itself. The moment will dissociate itself from its past and future, become independent from them, and thus appear to us *sub specie aeternitatis*. One might think here of the following metaphor. Within the conception of time suggested by the myth of eternal return, time is no longer the (historist) line, but should rather be thought of as a plane—a plane consisting of an infinity of parallel (historist) lines. In this plane, instead of linking the points on one and the same line, one could also draw a line connecting all the points representing the *same* moment on each individual line. And of *that* line we can justifiably say that it symbolizes a conjunction of one moment (the line connects the points representing the same moment) and eternity (by crossing all the individual parallel lines of the plane, this line is part of the eternity in which the eternal return of the same must be situated). Thus Bollnow writes:

But what is essential is that the Eternity that presents itself here introduces a dimension lying beyond the extension of finite time [here we have the line connecting all the returns of one and the same moment] and is therefore no part of it, but is only possible as an extensionless moment of time [and this is the moment itself]. (my translation)¹¹⁷

116. For a discussion of the views of Kaufmann, Fink, Heidegger, and Stambough, see I. N. Bulhof-Rutgers, *Apollo's Wiederkehr, Eine Untersuchung der Rolle des Kreises in Nietzsche's Denken über Geschichte und Zeit*, The Hague, 1969; especially 136ff. Megill resolutely rejects the Nietzschean notion of eternal return as incomprehensible and incoherent; see Megill, *Prophets*, 84. For a most original interpretation of the myth of eternal return, see A. C. Danto, “Nietzsche,” in D. J. O'Connor, ed., *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, New York, 1964, 399–400. The idea is that since the number of energy states of the universe is finite and time is infinite, each energy state must return an infinite number of times.

117. “Aber wesentlich ist jetzt, dass die Ewigkeit, die hier aufbricht, eine Dimension bedeutet, die jenseits der Erstreckung der endlichen Zeit liegt und darum in dieser gar keine Zeitstrecke erfüllt, sondern . . . im ausdehnungslosen Augenblick selber möglich ist” (Bollnow, *Stimmungen*, 223).

Whether we accept Nietzsche's speculation about eternity and eternal return or not (I do not, since I see in them merely a "transfiguration" of the historian's ideology of *Universalgeschichte*), it will be clear to anyone that Nietzsche proposes here a conception of time in which the moment, so to speak, revolts against its subjection to the historian's historical series. It is the revolution of the moment against (historical) evolution—a revolution that is both liberating and full of new dangers and uncertainties. Nietzsche's transfiguration of historicism gives us, however, anti- or post-historicism in a way similar to, though not identical with, my argument above. And as far as similarity is concerned, in both cases the moment assumes an "uncanny" independence—uncanny in the sense that what was made familiar and part of our historical identity is now outside the reach of historian's "appropriation."

So if noontime effects, as we saw, a dissolution of the connections between the objects of the world and between those objects and ourselves, this movement of dissolution will be strongly reinforced if it is related to the myth of eternal return stimulating similar effects. The symbolism of noontime and the myth of eternal return both effect a disintegration of the reassuring linear sequence, with the help of which we—and the historians—tried to appropriate the past and to make ourselves feel "at home" in it. "Let me therefore agree," writes Kundera when commenting on Nietzsche's myth, "that the idea of eternal return implies a perspective from which things appear other than we know them: they appear without the mitigating circumstance of their transitory nature." But, though the events of our personal past or those of human history now take on this uncanny independence from one another, a compensation for this dissolution of the past's coherence is offered to us since these events now can present themselves to us with the intensity of nostalgic remembrance. By a curious paradox, the dissolution of the historian's past is the condition for the possibility of having what really is an experience of the past. As Kundera goes on to say, in the Nietzschean process "of dissolution, everything is illuminated by the aura of nostalgia, even the guillotine."¹¹⁸ Only the defamiliarized past is the past we can really feel and touch.

Here we find, then, a last indication of how historicism and postmodernism are to be compared and how we should conceive of the postmodernist object of historical experience. Historicism objectified the past and thought of it as a linear process; it could do both things at the same time by placing—as suggested by Ranke and by Mink—the historian on his secure, transcendental, and transhistorical hilltop from where he could survey the flow of the river of time. The category of difference could only be

118. M. Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, London, 1984, 4.

located in the objectified past *itself*, since the “distance” from the transcendental hilltop to the river of time belongs to the realm of epistemology and not to that of history. By contrast, the postmodernist and the postmodernist’s experience of time, as exemplified by Nietzsche’s speculation on the *grosser Mittag* and on eternal return, urge us to historicize the historian’s epistemological distance. It does this by presenting the past as a defamiliarized present, as a part of our identity that has become strange, alien, and uncanny. Within *this* “constitution” of the past, it is not an objectified past itself, but “difference” that is the object of historical experience.

6. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have made an attempt to draw up an inventory of differences and parallels between historism and postmodernism. To that end, I have compared historian and postmodernist historical theory from the perspective of representation, ontology, epistemology, and historical experience. The major obstruction to my enterprise has been the fact that postmodernist historical theory up till now has never made a serious and sustained effort to define clearly its position from the perspectives just mentioned. The relevant positions thus had to be developed here for the sake of the comparison I wanted to make. One might object that I have thereby sinned against the spirit of postmodernism, one of the most essential differences between modernism (or historism) and postmodernism being that the latter is simply not interested in well-articulated views on ontology, epistemology, et cetera. To entertain such views is thus a typically modernist preoccupation. Indeed, postmodernists often are largely indifferent to traditional philosophical issues (a fact partially to be explained by the roots postmodernism has in literary theory). Yet, it is precisely for the sake of philosophical debate that I have permitted myself the liberty of extrapolating from postmodernist views a position on the above-mentioned traditional philosophical topics. My excuse for doing so is that I believe that the postmodernist can tell us something about the contemporary practice of history (especially in the field of the history of mentalities) that we do not yet know and that can best be expressed in terms of an, albeit imaginary, debate between the postmodernist and the historian (or the positivist). However, at this stage, the postmodernist might object that he is not interested in debate and argument and, once again, the facts about how postmodernists tend to react to their modernist opponents strengthens my suspicion that this is how the postmodernist might actually respond. Unfortunately there is much truth in Habermas’s criticism when he castigates in postmodernism “the methodical exaggerations of an uncompromising critique of rationality that is symptomatic of a con-

fused spirit of the times rather than a help in understanding it" (my translation).¹¹⁹ But if this indeed is the postmodernist reaction to the challenge of the debate with the modernist or the historian, I would like to confront him with his postmodernist kindred spirit Richard Rorty, who has made it so very clear that it is in debate and discussion that we should invest our hopes of the fruitfulness of all intellectual pursuit.

The conclusion of the comparison is that postmodernism is a radicalization of historicism and therefore neither so strange nor so irrational or objectionable as many scholars believe. The fragmentation of the historical world, the detail that is no longer seen as an expression of a greater whole, a nominalist tendency with regard to the ontology of representation, all these postmodernist views are already present in historicism. But where historicism and postmodernism most conspicuously differ is in the matter of the historical object. The historian's historical object is a reified past; postmodernism also knows a historical object, but one with an "uncanny" independence and autonomy of its own; yet this independence only announces itself in "the noontime of historical experience." It is a historical object that has its status of being part of an objective reality only thanks to a duplication in our awareness of ourselves and of our present; as such, it is not part of a reified past but situated in the distance or difference between past and present. It is the nostalgic historical sensation in which the different ways in which the historian and the postmodernist experience the past most clearly articulate themselves.

The purpose of this essay has not been to offer a eulogy for postmodernist historical theory. It is true that postmodernism (as presented here) may be able to avoid some of the halfway houses that historicism built for itself. Yet it still has to be seen whether postmodernism is more successful than historicism in its support of historiographical practice. For no historical theory has guaranteed historical writing greater and better-deserved triumphs than historicism. And there may be much truth to Rorty's assertion that, to a large extent, postmodernist theories depend and even feed upon their modernist counterparts.¹²⁰ This essay, therefore, does not wish to advertise a route from historicism to postmodernism which we are all compelled to follow; it is merely a rough and provisional map for charting the intellectual territory in which the modernist historian and the postmodernist can both live and thrive. We must understand, not recommend.

119. "den methodischen Übertreibungen einer total gewordenen Vernunftkritik, die einen diffusen Zeitgeist eher symptomatisch zum Ausdruck als auf den Begriff bringt" (J. Habermas, *Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit: Kleine politische Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main, 1985, 135).

120. R. Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing," in Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Brighton, 1982, 107–108.

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